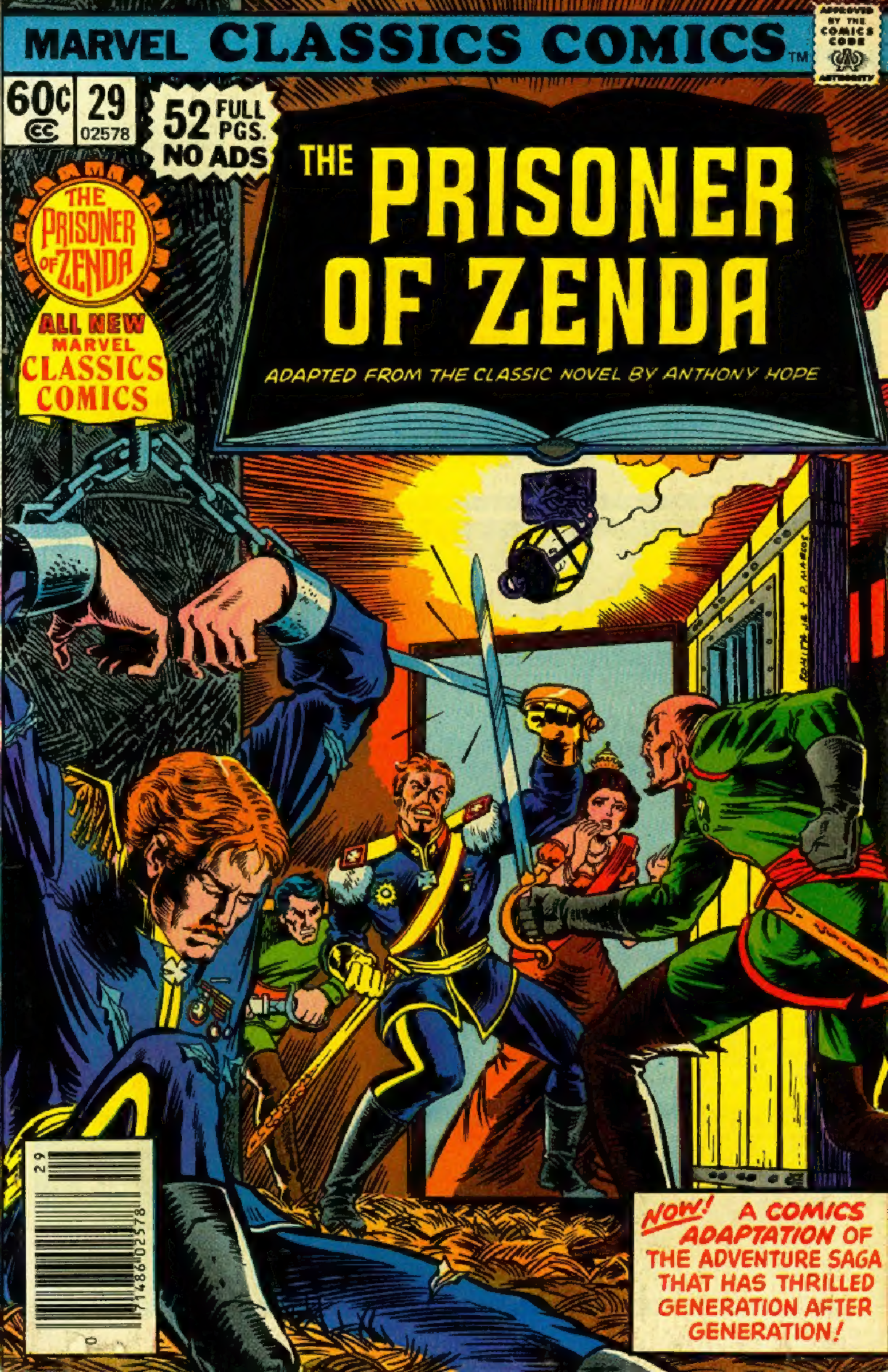
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THE PRISONER OF ZENDA
ALL NEW MARVEL CLASSICS COMICS
THE PRISONER OF ZENDA
ADAPTED FROM THE CLASSIC NOVEL BY ANTHONY HOPE
NOW! A COMICS ADAPTATION OF THE ADVENTURE SAGA THAT HAS THRILLED GENERATION AFTER GENERATION!

STAN LEE presents

PRISONER OF ZENDA

by Anthony Hope

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins, British novelist, was born on February 9th, 1863, the second son of Reverend F.C. Hawkins of London. He received his education at Marlborough and Balliol college in Oxford. In 1877, he was called to the bar in Middle temple. Hope married Elizabeth Somerville Sheldon of New York in 1903. He was knighted in 1918, and died peacefully in 1933.

Hope was a natural storyteller, whose style influenced the creation of several literary genres. The young novelist achieved enormous popular success upon publication in May 1894, of THE PRISONER OF ZENDA. Hope owed partial inspiration for the novel to Robert Louis Stevenson's PRINCE OTTO. Zenda established "Ruritanian romance," which set the tone for later works christened after their fictitious localities. THE DOLLY DIALOGUES published a few weeks after ZENDA, was a precursor of an entire school of epigrammatic drawing-room comedy. In a series of novels, Hope progressed from light comedy and chivalrous romance into more meaningful fiction as exhibited in THE GOD IN THE CAR, which exposed the effects on English society of Cecil Rhode's career. Other novels included HALF A HERO, a study of Australian politics, and TRISTRAM OF BLENT, a study of family pride.

PRISONER OF ZENDA has a timeless magic which has made its appeal universal. A dramatic stage version with Sir George Alexander as Rudolph Rassendyll ran for an extensive period at the St. James Theater. Since then, numerous versions have enthralled audiences both on television and in moviehouses.

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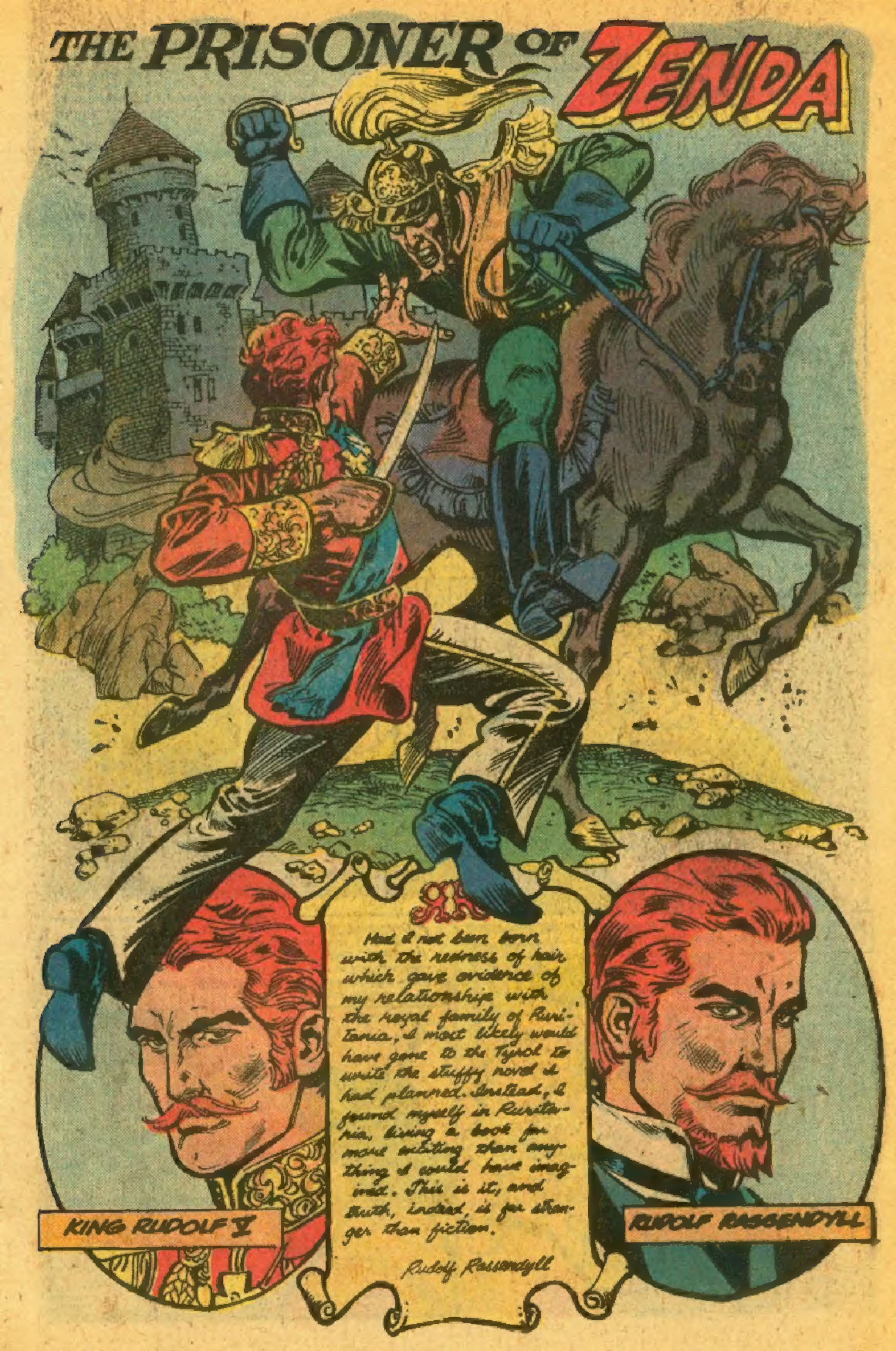
THE PRISONER OF ZENDA



Had I not been born with the redness of hair which gave evidence of my relationship with the royal family of Ruritania, I most likely would have gone to the Tyrol to write the stuffy novel I had planned. Instead, I found myself in Ruritania, living a book far more exciting than anything I could have imagined. This is it, and truth, indeed, is far stranger than fiction.

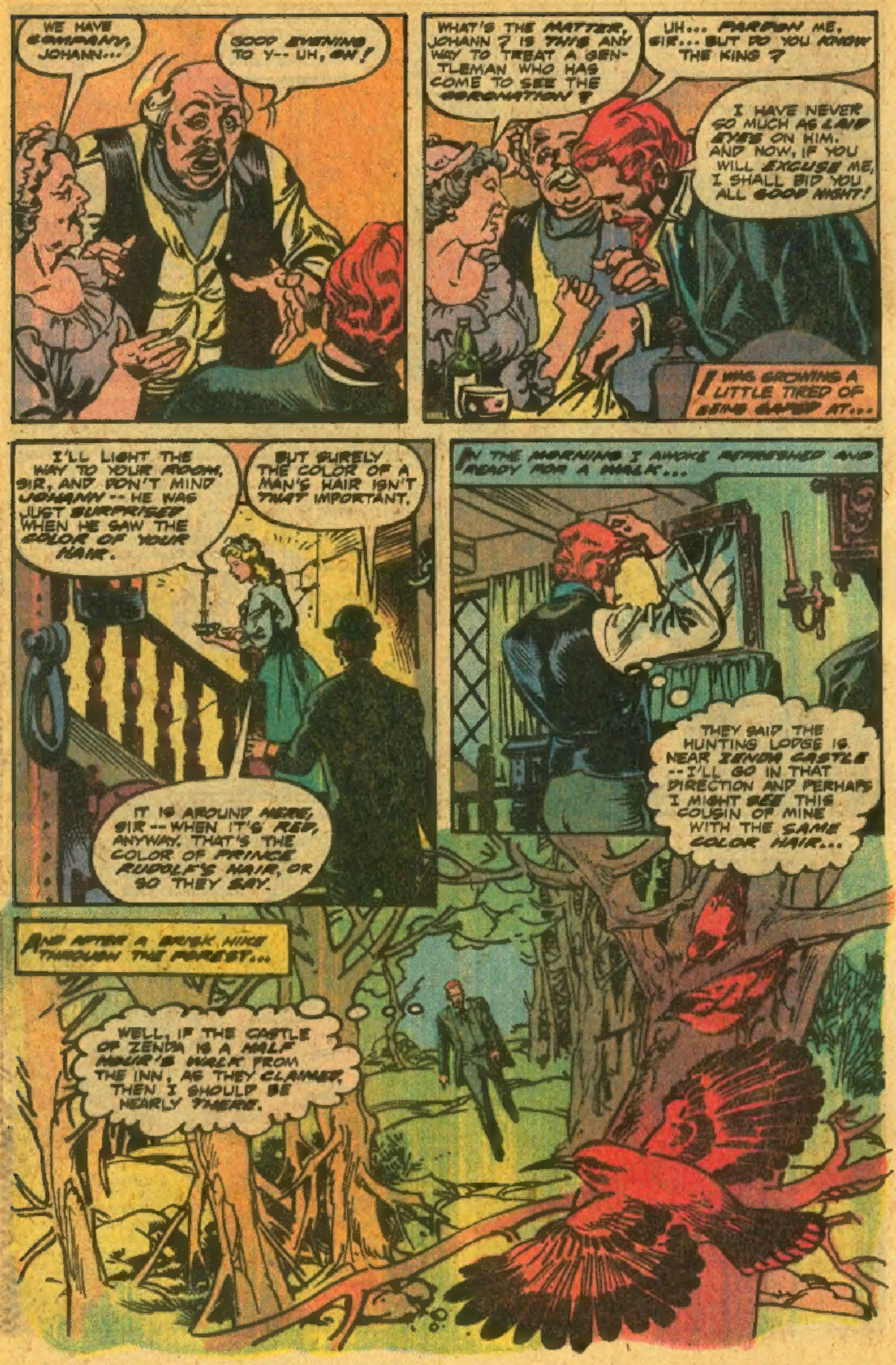
Rudolf Rassendyll

KING RUDOLF V

RUDOLF RASSENDYLL

BOTH MY BROTHER LORD BURLESDON AND HIS CHARMING WIFE ROSE CAME TO SEE ME OFF FROM LONDON STATION...
I'M SO GLAD FOR YOU, RUDOLF --AT LAST YOU'LL HAVE A CHANCE TO WRITE YOUR BOOK. GOODBYE, AND PLEASANT JOURNEY.
FAREWELL.
BUT AS THE TRAIN GOT UNDERWAY, ALL PLANS FOR MY BOOK WERE CROWDED OUT BY A CERTAIN NEWSPAPER HEADLINE...
EH--? IT SAYS RUDOLF OF THE HOUSE OF RUPPERTS IS TO BE CROWNED KING OF RURITANIA! WHY, HE'S A DISTANT COUSIN OF MINE...
THAT SETTLES IT, THEN. WE'VE NEVER EVEN SEEN EACH OTHER, BUT HOW CAN I PASS UP MEETING A COUSIN WHO WILL SOON BECOME A KING? INSTEAD OF THE TYROL, I SHALL GO TO THE CORONATION IN STRELSAU, RURITANIA.
THUS, I MADE THE CROSSING WITH BRIGHTER ANTICIPATION FOR MY NEW AND IMPETUOUS PLANS. BUT SHORTLY AFTER I BOARDED THE TRAIN IN PARIS, A FELLOW TRAVELER ENTERED MY COMPARTMENT AND...
OH! I...
APPARENTLY, THE MERE SIGHT OF ME CAUSED THE WOMAN A SEVERE SHOCK...
MADAM, YOU HAVE DROPPED YOUR PURSE. MAY I...?
WHY, I... I... TH-THANK YOU, SIR...
NATURALLY, I WONDERED WHAT IT WAS ABOUT MY APPEARANCE THAT HAD AFFECTED THE LADY SO DEEPLY, BUT AFTER NERVOUSLY GLANCING AT ME SEVERAL TIMES, SHE DELIBERATELY AVERTED MY EYES FOR THE REST OF THE JOURNEY...
WE ARE NEARING THE RURITANIAN BORDER NOW-- EVIDENTLY MY STRANGE COMPANION IS ALSO PLANNING TO ATTEND THE CORONATION.

SINCE I IMAGINED THERE WOULD BE LITTLE CHANCE OF OBTAINING LODGING IN CROWDED STRELSAU, I DECIDED TO GET OFF THE TRAIN AT ZENDA --A SMALL TOWN SOME FIFTY MILES FROM THE CAPITAL...
ON THE STATION PLATFORM, I KNEW BEYOND A DOUBT THAT THE MYSTERY HAD NOT BEEN BORN IN MY IMAGINATION...
THERE SHE IS-- STARING AT ME AGAIN. I WONDER IF I KNOW HER FROM SOMEWHERE, AND SHOULD HAVE RECOGNIZED HER...
SHRUGGING OFF THE WHOLE MATTER I QUICKLY FOUND THE ZENDA INN...
I SHOULD LIKE A ROOM FOR THE NIGHT-- BUT FIRST A MEAL.
CERTAINLY. BE SEATED AT A TABLE, SIR, AND MY DAUGHTER WILL SERVE YOU.
ANXIOUS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MY ROYAL COUSIN, I QUERIED THE SERVING GIRL WHO ANSWERED MY QUESTIONS WITHOUT HESITATION...
AND WHERE IS PRINCE RUDOLF RIGHT NOW?
AT THE ROYAL HUNTING LODGE IN ZENDA FOREST --NOT FAR FROM HERE, BUT HE'LL BE LEAVING FOR STRELSAU ON THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW, TO BE CROWNED KING.
FEW PEOPLE IN THE KINGDOM EVEN KNOW PRINCE RUDOLF, SINCE HE'S SPENT MOST OF HIS LIFE AWAY FROM RURITANIA. BUT HIS BROTHER -- DUKE MICHAEL -- HAS ALWAYS LIVED HERE, AT ZENDA CASTLE.
WE CALL HIM BLACK MICHAEL BECAUSE OF HIS JET BLACK HAIR.
THEN PRINCE RUDOLF AND MICHAEL ARE FRIENDS?
HAH! THEY LOVE EACH OTHER AS MUCH AS MEN CAN WHO WANT THE SAME THRONE AND THE SAME WIFE.
HUSH, CHILD-- YOU'RE SPEAKING ABOUT ROYALTY. BESIDES, HERE COMES JOHANN, THE KEEPER OF DUKE MICHAEL'S CASTLE.


WE HAVE COMPANY, JOHANN...
GOOD EVENING TO Y-- UH, OH!
WHAT'S THE MATTER, JOHANN? IS THIS ANY WAY TO TREAT A GENTLEMAN WHO HAS COME TO SEE THE CORONATION?
UH... PARDON ME, SIR... BUT DO YOU KNOW THE KING?
I HAVE NEVER SO MUCH AS LAID EYES ON HIM. AND NOW, IF YOU WILL EXCUSE ME, I SHALL BID YOU ALL GOOD NIGHT!
I WAS BECOMING A LITTLE TIRED OF BEING GAPED AT...
I'LL LIGHT THE WAY TO YOUR ROOM, SIR, AND DON'T MIND JOHANN -- HE WAS JUST SURPRISED WHEN HE SAW THE COLOR OF YOUR HAIR.
BUT SURELY THE COLOR OF A MAN'S HAIR ISN'T THAT IMPORTANT.
IT IS AROUND HERE, SIR -- WHEN IT'S RED, ANYWAY. THAT'S THE COLOR OF PRINCE RUDOLF'S HAIR, OR SO THEY SAY.
IN THE MORNING I AWOKE REFRESHED AND READY FOR A WALK...
THEY SAID THE HUNTING LODGE IS NEAR ZENDA CASTLE -- I'LL GO IN THAT DIRECTION AND PERHAPS I MIGHT SEE THIS COUSIN OF MINE WITH THE SAME COLOR HAIR...
AND AFTER A BRISK HIKE THROUGH THE FOREST...
WELL, IF THE CASTLE OF ZENDA IS A HALF HOUR'S WALK FROM THE INN, AS THEY CLAIMED, THEN I SHOULD BE NEARLY THERE.

INDEED, AS I EMERGED FROM THE FOREST INTO THE NEXT CLEARING...
SO THAT'S ZENDA CASTLE --AND CERTAINLY A FOREBODING PLACE. I WOULD NOT CARE TO BE AN ENEMY OF BLACK MICHAEL'S...
HOW LONG I SLEPT I CANNOT SAY, BUT WHEN MY EYES OPENED I FOUND TWO MEN STUDYING ME WITH GREAT INTEREST...
LOOK AT THAT --SHAVE HIM AND HE'D BE THE PERFECT IMAGE OF THE KING.
AND HE'S THE RIGHT HEIGHT, TOO...
OH WELL, WHY WORRY ABOUT THAT? THIS IS MUCH TOO BEAUTIFUL A SPOT TO BOTHER ABOUT BLACK MICHAEL'S CASTLE --AND BESIDES, ALL THIS FRESH AIR AND EXERCISE HAS MADE ME SLEEPY...
WHAT IS YOUR NAME, SIR?
PERHAPS I MIGHT ASK YOU THE SAME QUESTION.
VERY WELL, SIR -- THIS IS COLONEL SAPT, AND I AM FRITZ VON TARLENHEIM. WE ARE BOTH IN THE SERVICE OF THE KING OF RURITANIA AND --
SAPT! FRITZ! WHERE ARE YOU --?!

IT'S THE KING.
COLONEL... FRITZ -- WHO IS THAT GENTLEMAN WITH YOU?
THE KING STEPPED NEARER...

... AND WHEN HE CAME WITHIN CLOSER VIEW, WE COULD DO NOTHING BUT STARE AT EACH OTHER FOR AN INSTANT OF FROZEN SHOCK...
LORD, MAN, WERE IT NOT FOR THE HAIR ON YOUR FACE YOU MIGHT AS WELL BE ME... AND I, YOU!

I AM RUDOLF RASSENDYLL, SIRE, A TRAVELER FROM ENGLAND ON MY WAY TO YOUR CORONATION. MY BROTHER IS NOW LORD BURLESDON.
RASSENDYLL? BURLESDON? WELL THEN, YOU'RE MY COUSIN -- THOUGH YOU COULD EASILY BY MY BROTHER! A HEARTY WELCOME TO RURITANIA, COUSIN RUDOLF -- AND COME, WE MUST DINE TOGETHER AT THE LODGE!

EMERGING FROM THE WOODS, WE CAME UPON A RUSTIC HUNTING LODGE...
WELL, JOSEF -- IS DINNER READY?
YES, SIRE, IT IS.

THE SERVANT SET AN EXTRA PLACE, AND WE SOON SET DOWN TO A PLENTIFUL MEAL -- AFTER WHICH JOSEF BROUGHT THE KING A BOTTLE OF WINE AND A SILVER CUP...
DUKE MICHAEL SENT THIS, SIRE.
OH, HE DID, DID HE JOSEF? WELL COME, BLACK MICHAEL!

MY FRIENDS, EVERYTHING I OWN IS YOURS -- EVEN HALF MY KINGDOM -- BUT ASK ME NOT FOR A SINGLE DROP OF THIS WINE, WHICH I'LL DRINK TO THE HEALTH OF THAT SLY RASCAL, MY BROTHER, BLACK MICHAEL!

THE KING HAD ALREADY CONSUMED A FAIR AMOUNT OF DRINK...
...AND WHEN HE FINISHED THE WINE SENT BY HIS BROTHER...
WELL, PLEASANT DREAMS TO HIS MAJESTY!
AND IF THE TRUTH BE KNOWN, I WAS FEELING THE DRINK MYSELF... AND, TOO, THE DAY'S EXCITEMENT HAD WEARIED ME. INDEED, THAT WAS THE LAST I REMEMBERED OF THE EVENING...
WHETHER I HAD SLEPT A MINUTE OR AN HOUR, I KNEW NOT, BUT I CERTAINLY AWOKE WITH A START...
WHAA--?! COLONEL SAPT, YOUR JOKE GOES TOO FAR!
THIS IS NO JOKE, RASSENDYLL--IT'S FIVE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING, AND THE KING HAS BEEN DRUGGED!
IT WAS BLACK MICHAEL'S WINE--PART OF HIS PLAN TO SEIZE THE THRONE--FOR IF KING RUDOLF DOES NOT APPEAR AT HIS CORONATION, HE WILL FORFEIT HIS CROWN, AND BLACK MICHAEL WILL BECOME RULER.
WELL, IT MUST HAVE BEEN FATE THAT SENT YOU HERE, RASSENDYLL, AND IT WILL BE FATE THAT SENDS YOU NOW TO STRELSAU--TO TAKE THE KING'S PLACE IN THE CORONATION.
WHAT--?! NO--YOU MUST BE MAD!
ALL IS LOST IF PRINCE RUDOLF DOES NOT APPEAR IN STRELSAU--TODAY. I KNOW WHAT BLACK MICHAEL MEANS TO DO!
YOU MUST GO, RASSENDYLL--TO SAVE THE THRONE FOR THE RIGHTFUL KING!
MY HEAD WAS SWIMMING--REELING--AS I STOOD THERE IN FIERCE SHOCK, TORN WITH INDECISION. ME--IMPERSONATING A KING!

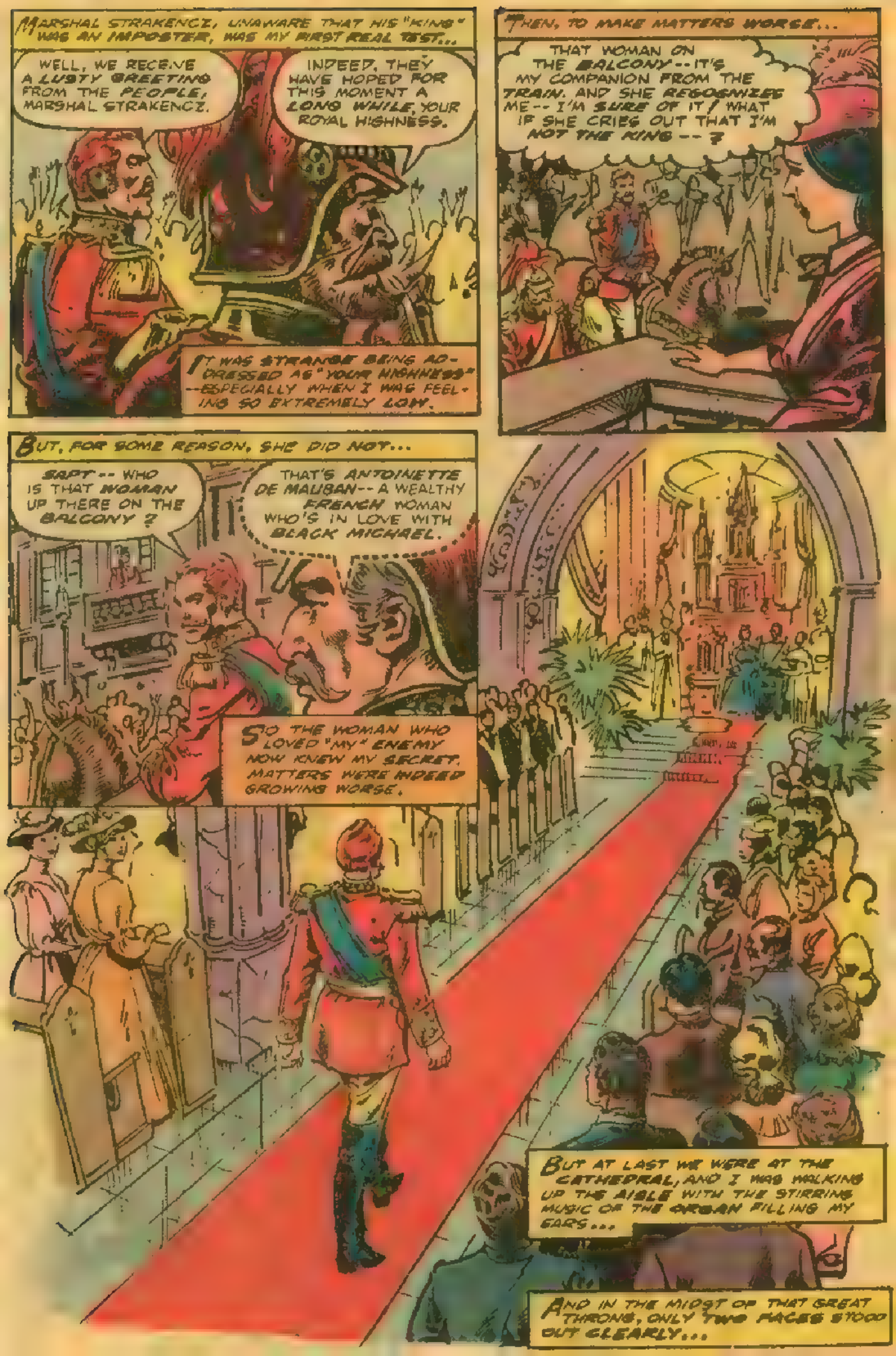
BUT FINALLY, STILL NOT REALIZING THE FULL CONSEQUENCES, I FOUND THE WORDS...
VERY WELL... I SHALL GO...WHETHER THE KING FORGIVES ME OR NOT, I SHALL GO...

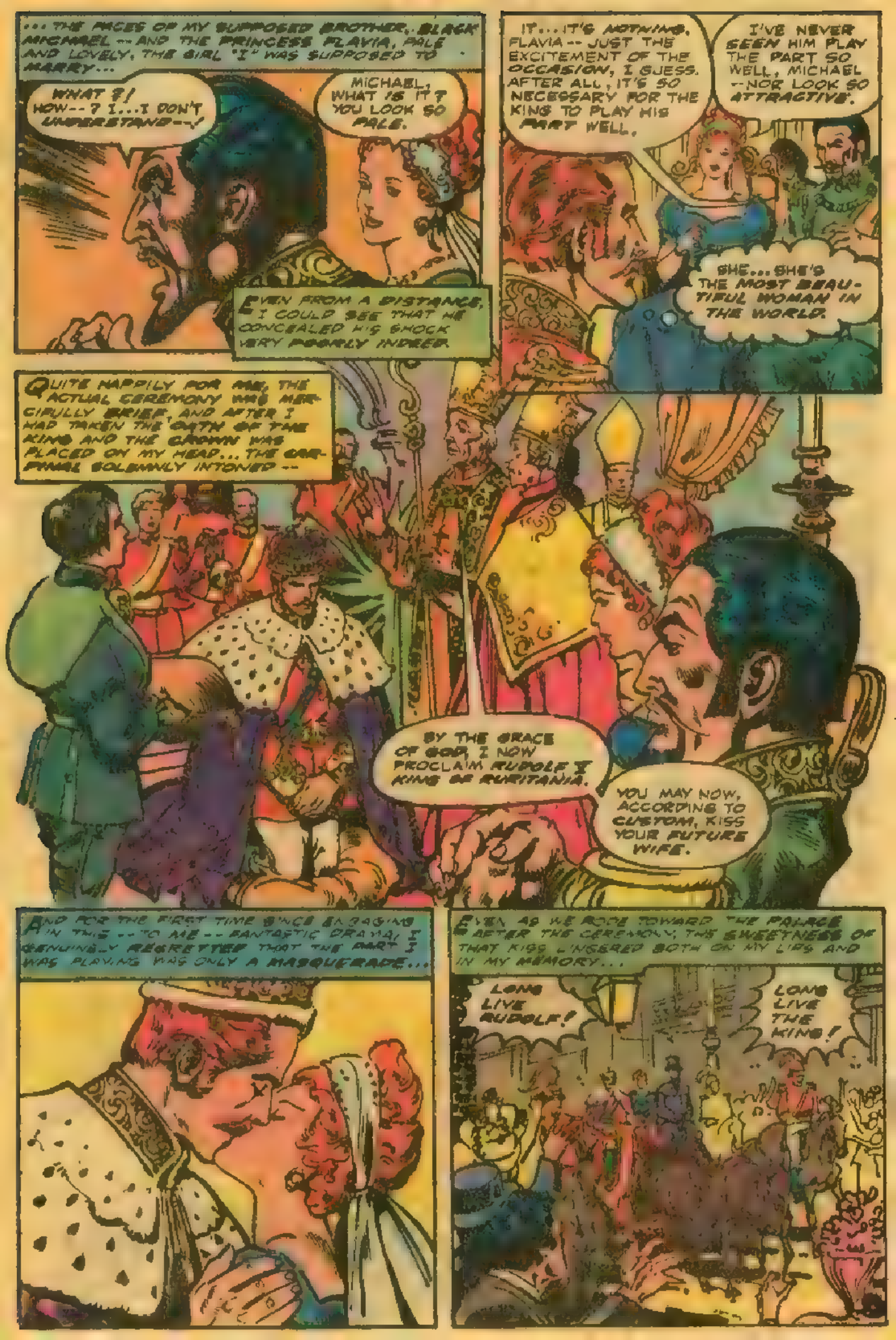
THEN, IN A DAZE, I MOVED OFF TO SHAVE MY BEARD AS SAPT AND FRITZ GAVE INSTRUCTIONS TO JOSEF...
WE'LL LEAVE THE KING IN YOUR CARE, JOSEF--TAKE HIM TO THE WINE CELLAR AND KEEP HIM HIDDEN THERE AT ALL COSTS.
AND IF BLACK MICHAEL'S MEN SEE THROUGH OUR SCHEME AND COME LOOKING FOR THE REAL KING, BLUFF THEM OFF ANY WAY YOU CAN.

SAPT SOON ENTERED IN FULL CEREMONIAL ATTIRE...
BY JOVE, RAGSENDYLL, I DO BELIEVE WE'LL GET AWAY WITH IT YET! WE'LL REACH THE STRELSAU TRAIN ON HORSEBACK --NOW HURRY.

DOUBTS AND FEARS FILLED MY MIND ALL THE MORE AS WE ARRIVED IN STRELSAU--NOT ONLY WAS I NOW PLAYING THE ROLE OF A KING, BUT I WAS ALSO TAKING THE PLACE OF A MAN WITH APPARENTLY QUITE RUTHLESS ENEMIES...
SAPT WAS STILL COACHING ME ON THE CUSTOMS OF THE COURT AS WE WERE MET BY A ROYAL ESCORT IN THE CHARGE OF MARSHAL STRAKENCZ.

AND SOON IT WAS ALL A BEWILDERING WHIRL. THE PROCESSION TO THE CATHEDRAL WAS LINED WITH CHEERING THRONGS, AND THE BELLS OF THE CITY PEALED JOYOUSLY. THE KING HAD ARRIVED FOR HIS CORONATION!
GOD SAVE RUDOLF! IF HE'S RED, HE'S RIGHT!
I WAS RUDOLF, AND I WAS RED --BUT RIGHT FOR WHAT?


MARSHAL STRAKENCZ, UNAWARE THAT HIS "KING" WAS AN IMPOSTER, WAS MY FIRST REAL TEST...
WELL, WE RECEIVE A LUSTY GREETING FROM THE PEOPLE, MARSHAL STRAKENCZ.
INDEED, THEY HAVE HOPED FOR THIS MOMENT A LONG WHILE, YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS.
IT WAS STRANGE BEING ADDRESSED AS "YOUR HIGHNESS" --ESPECIALLY WHEN I WAS FEELING SO EXTREMELY LOW.
THEN, TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE...
THAT WOMAN ON THE BALCONY--IT'S MY COMPANION FROM THE TRAIN. AND SHE RECOGNIZES ME--I'M SURE OF IT! WHAT IF SHE CRIES OUT THAT I'M NOT THE KING--?
BUT, FOR SOME REASON, SHE DID NOT...
SAPT--WHO IS THAT WOMAN UP THERE ON THE BALCONY?
THAT'S ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN--A WEALTHY FRENCH WOMAN WHO'S IN LOVE WITH BLACK MICHAEL.
SO THE WOMAN WHO LOVED "MY" ENEMY NOW KNEW MY SECRET. MATTERS WERE INDEED GROWING WORSE.
BUT AT LAST WE WERE AT THE CATHEDRAL, AND I WAS WALKING UP THE AISLE WITH THE STIRRING MUSIC OF THE ORGAN FILLING MY EARS...
AND IN THE MIDST OF THAT GREAT THRONG, ONLY TWO FACES STOOD OUT CLEARLY...


... THE FACES OF MY SUPPOSED BROTHER, BLACK MICHAEL -- AND THE PRINCESS FLAVIA, PALE AND LOVELY, THE GIRL "I" WAS SUPPOSED TO MARRY...
WHAT ?! HOW-- ? I...I DON'T UNDERSTAND--!
MICHAEL, WHAT IS IT ? YOU LOOK SO PALE.
EVEN FROM A DISTANCE, I COULD SEE THAT HE CONCEALED HIS SHOCK VERY POORLY INDEED.
IT... IT'S NOTHING, FLAVIA -- JUST THE EXCITEMENT OF THE OCCASION, I GUESS. AFTER ALL, IT'S SO NECESSARY FOR THE KING TO PLAY HIS PART WELL.
I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM PLAY THE PART SO WELL, MICHAEL -- NOR LOOK SO ATTRACTIVE.
SHE... SHE'S THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD.
QUITE HAPPILY FOR ME, THE ACTUAL CEREMONY WAS MERCIFULLY BRIEF, AND AFTER I HAD TAKEN THE OATH OF THE KING AND THE CROWN WAS PLACED ON MY HEAD... THE CARDINAL SOLEMNLY INTONED --
BY THE GRACE OF GOD, I NOW PROCLAIM RUDOLF I KING OF RURITANIA.
YOU MAY NOW, ACCORDING TO CUSTOM, KISS YOUR FUTURE WIFE.
AND FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE ENGAGING IN THIS -- TO ME -- FANTASTIC DRAMA, I GENUINELY REGRETTED THAT THE PART I WAS PLAYING WAS ONLY A MASQUERADE...
EVEN AS WE RODE TOWARD THE PALACE AFTER THE CEREMONY, THE SWEETNESS OF THAT KISS LINGERED BOTH ON MY LIPS AND IN MY MEMORY...
LONG LIVE RUDOLF!
LONG LIVE THE KING!

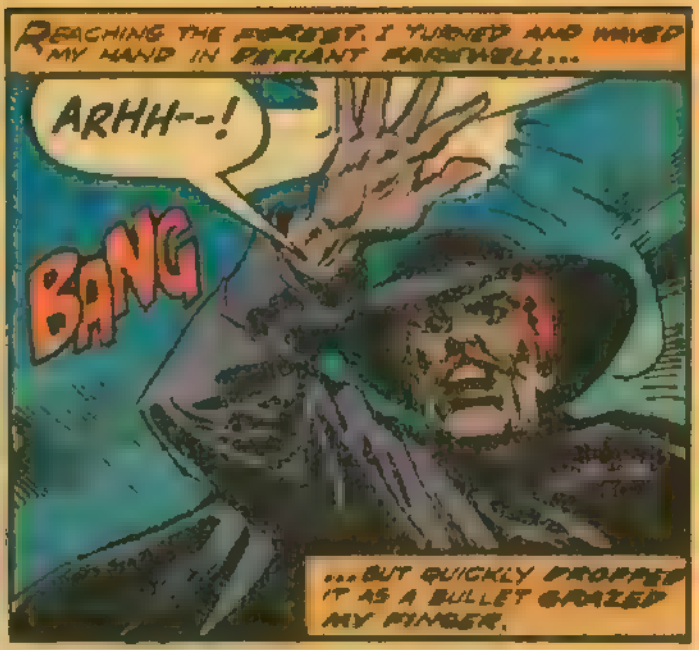
YOU KNOW, RUDOLF, YOU LOOK DIFFERENT SOMEHOW TODAY. THERE'S SOMETHING NEW... EXCITING... ABOUT YOU. YOU WERE ABSOLUTELY WONDERFUL AT THE CEREMONY.
WHY, I... AH, THANK YOU, FLAVIA. I HOPE I MAY... ALWAYS PLEASE YOU.
AND SO IT'S FINALLY DONE! ON BEHALF OF RUDOLF V, THE RIGHTFUL MONARCH OF RURITANIA, I SECURE POSSESSION OF THE PALACE OF HIS ANCESTORS -- AND HOLD FOR HIS HAND AND HEART THE BEAUTIFUL FLAVIA.
BUT, I WAS BEGINNING TO REGRET THAT IT WAS ONLY FOR A WHILE.
BY FIVE O'CLOCK, SAPT, FRITZ AND I HAD REPAIRED TO THE PALACE DRESSING ROOM TO RELAX AND PLAN IN PRIVACY...
NOW LET'S GET BACK TO THE KING, SO I CAN RETURN TO BEING PLAIN OLD RUDOLF RASSENDYLL.
VERY WELL -- YOU AND I WILL RIDE TO THE ZENDA LODGE TONIGHT, AND BRING THE KING BACK TO THE PALACE. BUT FRITZ WILL REMAIN HERE...
NOW LISTEN TO ME, FRITZ. KEEP THE KING'S BEDROOM DOOR LOCKED AND ALLOW NO ONE TO ENTER. SAY HE HAS RETIRED AND CANNOT BE DISTURBED UNTIL MORNING. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
PERFECTLY, COLONEL SAPT.
THAT NIGHT, SAPT LED ME TO A SECRET PASSAGEWAY...
GOOD ENOUGH, RASSENDYLL -- THAT DISGUISE SHOULD DO THE TRICK. BUT IF ANYONE SHOULD CHALLENGE US, REMEMBER THAT YOU'RE MY CAPTIVE!
NOW COME -- WITH ANY LUCK, WE SHOULD REACH THE HUNTING LODGE BY MIDNIGHT.

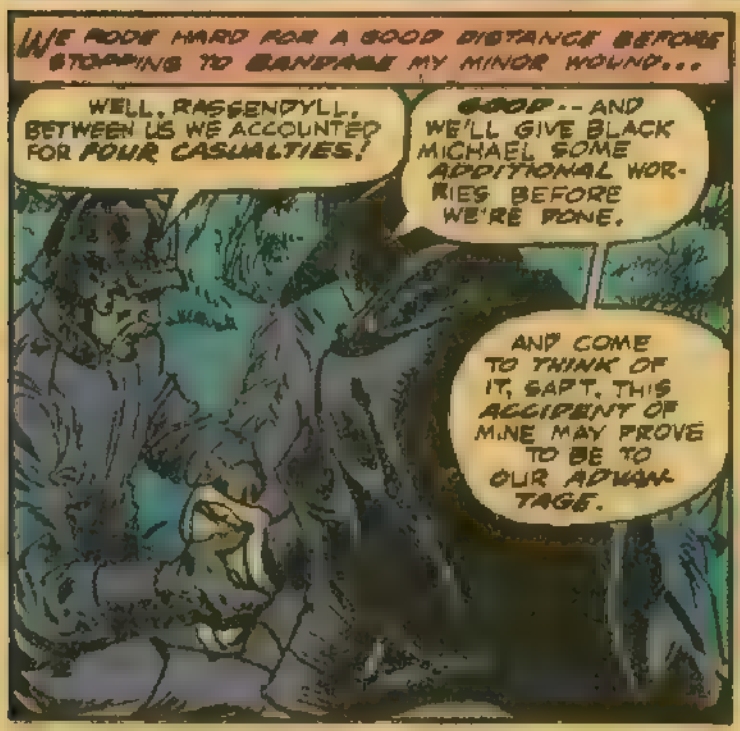
NOW WHEN I OPEN THIS DOOR, WE'LL FIND OURSELVES OUTSIDE THE PALACE GROUNDS --
"--WHERE OUR HORSES ARE WAITING."
ALL RIGHT, RASSENDYLL, WE'RE OFF. JUST PRAY TO HEAVEN THAT OUR MISSION WILL BE SUCCESSFUL!
OUR JOURNEY WAS UNEVENTFUL, AND WE MADE GOOD TIME, BUT WHEN WE REACHED THE LODGE IT WAS DARK AND STILL AS DEATH...
NO LIGHTS --AND WHERE'S JOSEF?
THE KING! WHAT IF SOMETHING'S HAPPENED TO HIM?!
THE DOOR OPENED TOO EASILY, AND SAPT LIT A LANTERN AS WE DESCENDED THE CELLAR STAIRS...
LOOK -- DOWN THERE -- NEAR THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS...
BLOODSTRING, SAPT -- LEADING INTO THE WINE CELLAR!
COME ON, RASSENDYLL -- WE'LL SOON LEARN WHAT THIS MEANS.
IT'S JOSEF! HE'S DEAD -- SLAIN WHILE GUARDING THE KING!
AND THE KING IS GONE, RASSENDYLL -- ABDUCTED BY JOSEF'S MURDERERS... BLACK MICHAEL'S MEN.
IMMEDIATELY, WE BOTH FEARED THE WORST -- THAT THE KING WAS NOW A PRISONER OF HIS OWN BROTHER, IN THE IMPENETRABLE ZENDA CASTLE.

STILL, WE HAD TO BE SURE, AND SEARCHED EVERY INCH OF THE CELLAR AS WELL AS THE REST OF THE LODGE. AND WHEN THE KING WAS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND...
COME, RAGGENDYLL -- WE MUST RETURN TO STRELGAU AND MAINTAIN THE MASK. OTHERWISE, BLACK MICHAEL WILL CLAIM THE THRONE AND FLAVIA.
VERY WELL, SAPT -- BUT FIRST WE MUST BURY JOSEF...
NO, THERE ISN'T TIME -- THEY MAY BE BACK TO --
WAIT -- LISTEN TO THAT. THEY'RE COMING RIGHT NOW!
WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO THE HORSES.
WE MADE IT TO THE HORSES AND WAITED IN BATED SILENCE AS THE OMINOUS PARTY APPROACHED -- FOUR MOUNTED AND FOUR ON FOOT CARRYING VARIOUS TOOLS...
YOU SEE, RAGGENDYLL? THEY'LL DO THE JOB OF BURIAL FOR US.
YES -- BUT BY HEAVEN, I'LL NOT LEAVE THIS PLACE UNTIL I'VE STRUCK A BLOW AT THE FILTHY MURDERERS!
IF YOU MUST, RAGGENDYLL, BUT WAIT UNTIL THEY ARE DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE LODGE AND THEN --
"-- CHARGE WITHOUT WARNING!!"
WE PLUNGED HEADLONG INTO THEIR MIDST, TAKING THEM BY SURPRISE SO THEY COULD NOT DRAW THEIR GUNS, AND HOPING TO USE OUR SWORDS WITH TELLING EFFECT...

INITIALLY, THE STRATEGY WORKED, AND FOR LONG MOMENTS THERE WAS THE HARSH CLANGOR OF STEEL STRIKING STEEL...
... BUT THEN I WAS FORCED TO WREST AN AXE FROM ONE OF MY ADVERSARIES, FOR I REALIZED THAT MY SWORD WAS TOO UNWIELDY AGAINST SUCH A WEAPON...
THERE'LL BE MORE THAN JOSEF'S BURIAL THIS NIGHT -- THAT I PROMISE YOU!
AS I DROPPED ANOTHER OPPONENT, I OBSERVED THAT SAPT WAS ALSO GIVING A GOOD ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF...
THAT'S IT, SAPT! WE'LL TURN THE GROUND RED WITH THESE VILLAINS!
BUT THEN, CHARGING FROM BEHIND...
SAPT! LOOK OUT, MAN!!
YOU SAVED ME THAT TIME, MY FRIEND, AND IF I CAN--
LOOK! IT'S THE KING -- THE KING!!

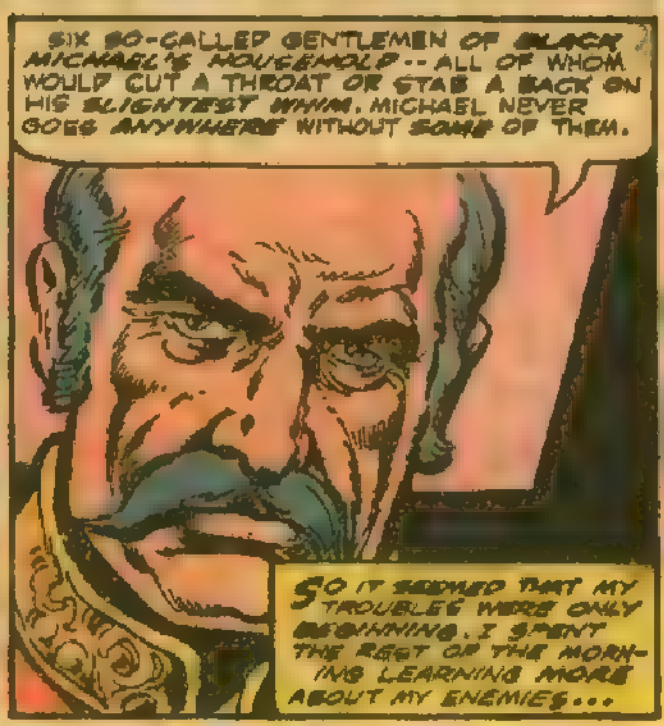
STOP THEM-- SHOOT THEM!!
COME ON, SAPT! WE'VE AVENGED JOSEPH'S DEATH BUT WE CAN'T FIGHT GUNFIRE-- LET'S GET AWAY FROM HERE

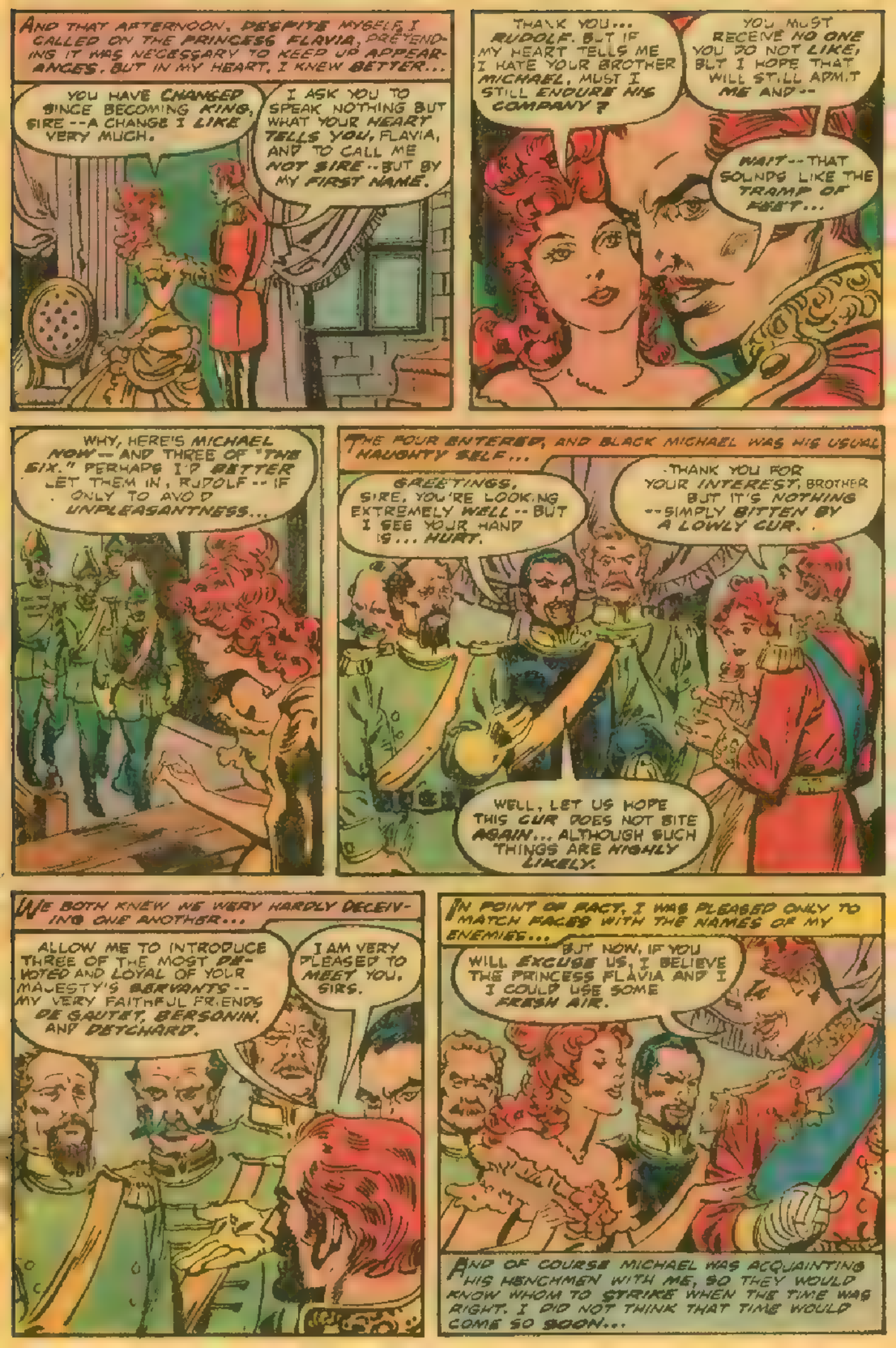

REACHING THE FOREST, I TURNED AND WAVED MY HAND IN DEFIANT FAREWELL...
ARHH--!
BANG
...BUT QUICKLY DROPPED IT AS A BULLET GRAZED MY FINGER.


WE RODE HARD FOR A GOOD DISTANCE BEFORE STOPPING TO BANDAGE MY MINOR WOUND...
WELL, RASSENDYLL, BETWEEN US WE ACCOUNTED FOR FOUR CASUALTIES!
GOOD-- AND WE'LL GIVE BLACK MICHAEL SOME ADDITIONAL WORRIES BEFORE WE'RE DONE.
AND COME TO THINK OF IT, SAPT, THIS ACCIPENT OF MINE MAY PROVE TO BE TO OUR ADVANTAGE.

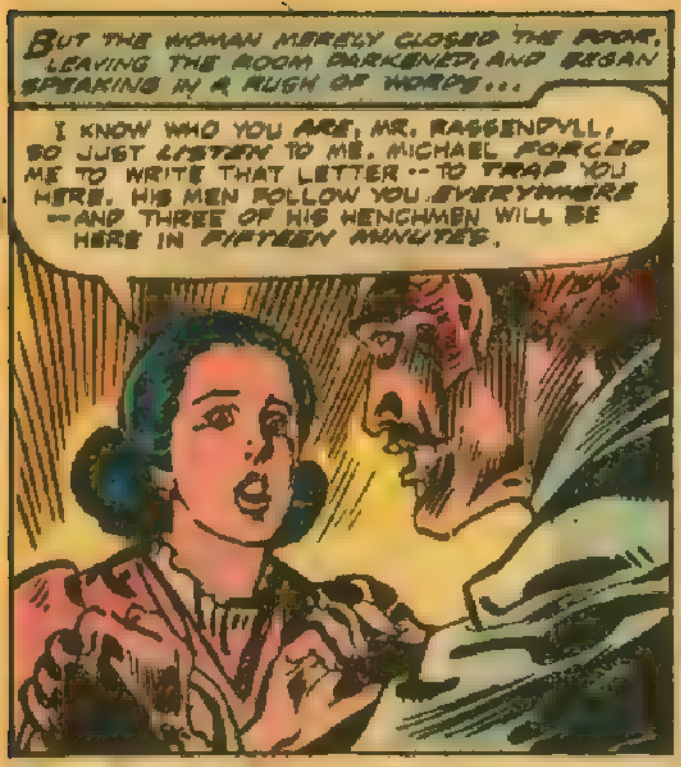
INDEED, BACK AT THE PALACE IN THE MORNING, A LARGE PILE OF DOCUMENTS AWAITED THE ROYAL SIGNATURE...
YOU SEE? WITH THIS INJURED HAND, I CAN'T BE EXPECTED TO MAKE ANYTHING MORE THAN A CROSS-- AND NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO ACCUSE THE KING'S SIGNATURE OF BEING A FORGERY.
GOOD, RASSENDYLL, BUT I MUST WARN YOU TO BE EXTRA CAREFUL NOW-- THREE OF "THE SIX" ARE HERE IN STRELSAU.

ONLY HALF FRITZ? ARE YOU SURE? THEN THE KING MUST BE ALIVE, AND THE OTHER THREE ARE GUARDING HIM AT ZENDA. WHICH THREE ARE HERE?
DE GAUTET, [redacted]SONIN, AND BETCHART-- LEAVING LAUENGRAM, KRAFSTEIN, AND RUPERT HENTZAU AT ZENDA.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? WHO THE DEVIL ARE "THE SIX"?

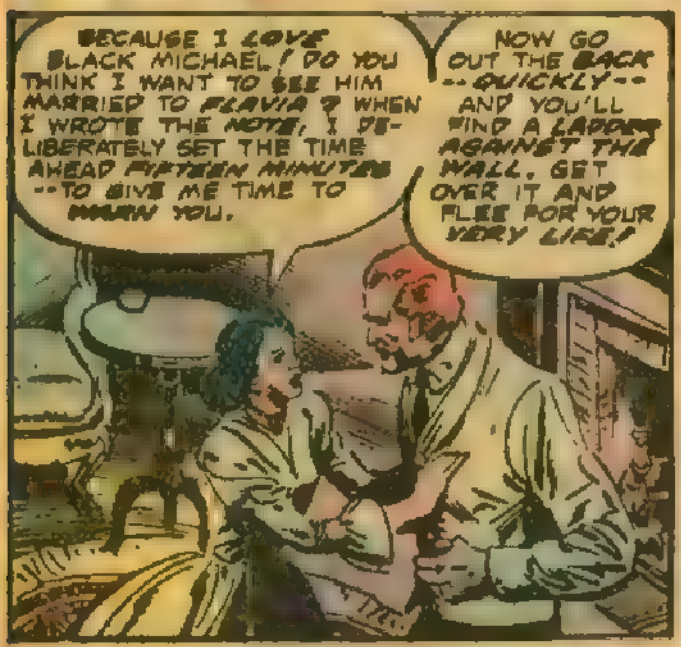

SIX SO-CALLED GENTLEMEN OF BLACK MICHAEL'S HOUSEHOLD-- ALL OF WHOM WOULD CUT A THROAT OR STAB A BACK ON HIS SLIGHTEST WHIM. MICHAEL NEVER GOES ANYWHERE WITHOUT SOME OF THEM.
SO IT SEEMED THAT MY TROUBLES WERE ONLY BEGINNING. I SPENT THE REST OF THE MORNING LEARNING MORE ABOUT MY ENEMIES...

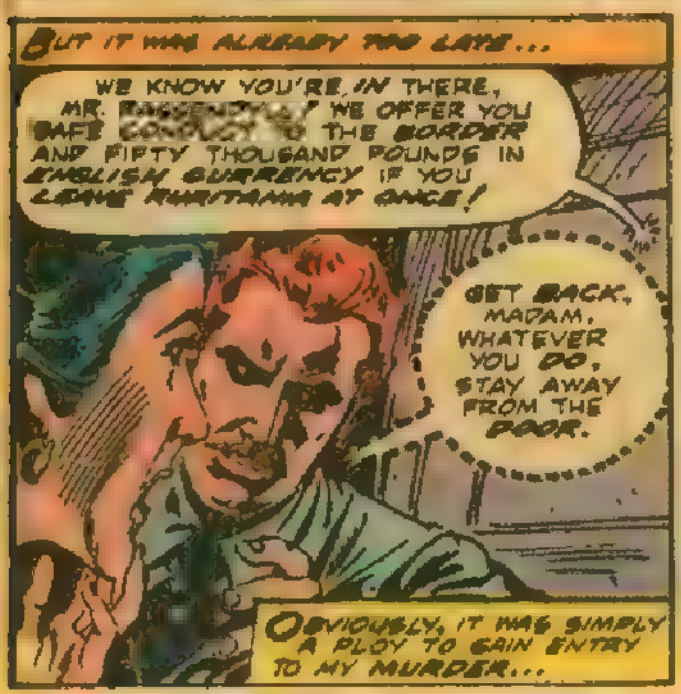

AND THAT AFTERNOON, DESPITE MYSELF, I CALLED ON THE PRINCESS FLAVIA, PRETENDING IT WAS NECESSARY TO KEEP UP APPEARANCES. BUT IN MY HEART, I KNEW BETTER...
YOU HAVE CHANGED SINCE BECOMING KING, SIRE--A CHANGE I LIKE VERY MUCH.
I ASK YOU TO SPEAK NOTHING BUT WHAT YOUR HEART TELLS YOU, FLAVIA, AND TO CALL ME NOT SIRE--BUT BY MY FIRST NAME.
THANK YOU... RUDOLF. BUT IF MY HEART TELLS ME I HATE YOUR BROTHER MICHAEL, MUST I STILL ENDURE HIS COMPANY?
YOU MUST RECEIVE NO ONE YOU DO NOT LIKE, BUT I HOPE THAT WILL STILL ADMIT ME AND--
WAIT--THAT SOUNDS LIKE THE TRAMP OF FEET...
WHY, HERE'S MICHAEL NOW--AND THREE OF "THE SIX." PERHAPS I'D BETTER LET THEM IN, RUDOLF--IF ONLY TO AVOID UNPLEASANTNESS...
THE FOUR ENTERED, AND BLACK MICHAEL WAS HIS USUAL NAUGHTY SELF...
GREETINGS, SIRE, YOU'RE LOOKING EXTREMELY WELL--BUT I SEE YOUR HAND IS... HURT.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST, BROTHER BUT IT'S NOTHING--SIMPLY BITTEN BY A LOWLY CUR.
WELL, LET US HOPE THIS CUR DOES NOT BITE AGAIN... ALTHOUGH SUCH THINGS ARE HIGHLY LIKELY.
WE BOTH KNEW WE WERE HARDLY DECEIVING ONE ANOTHER...
ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE THREE OF THE MOST DEVOTED AND LOYAL OF YOUR MAJESTY'S SERVANTS--MY VERY FAITHFUL FRIENDS DE GAUTET, BERSONIN, AND DETCHARD.
I AM VERY PLEASED TO MEET YOU, SIRS.
IN POINT OF FACT, I WAS PLEASED ONLY TO MATCH FACES WITH THE NAMES OF MY ENEMIES...
BUT NOW, IF YOU WILL EXCUSE US, I BELIEVE THE PRINCESS FLAVIA AND I COULD USE SOME FRESH AIR.
AND OF COURSE MICHAEL WAS ACQUAINTING HIS HENCHMEN WITH ME, SO THEY WOULD KNOW WHOM TO STRIKE WHEN THE TIME WAS RIGHT. I DID NOT THINK THAT TIME WOULD COME SO SOON...

THE VERY NEXT DAY, HOWEVER, AS SAPT AND I WERE PLAYING CHESS, I RECEIVED A LETTER...
WHO SENT IT, RASSENDYLL?
IT'S SIMPLY SIGNED "A." I WONDER IF...
YES, BY JOVE, IT MUST BE FROM ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN -- MY FELLOW PASSENGER ON THE TRAIN AND SHE WHO LOVES BLACK MICHAEL! SAPT, WE'VE RUN INTO A STALEMATE, AND NOT ON THE CHESSBOARD.
LOOK HERE...
. . . !
Do as this bids you. Go to the house at the end of New Avenue at midnight... and alone. Enter the gate in the wall back of the garden, turn to the right, walk to the summer house. If you fail, your life will be in danger.
SAPT, I'M GOING.
ARE YOU MAD, RASSENDYLL?! BLACK MICHAEL HIMSELF OBVIOUSLY DICTATED THIS LETTER! DO YOU WANT TO WALK RIGHT INTO A TRAP--?!
TRAP OR NO TRAP, I INTEND TO FIND OUT WHAT THIS LETTER MEANS--AND YOU'LL HAVE THE DEVIL OF A TIME STOPPING ME!
HE DID NOT EVEN TRY, INSTEAD RIDING WITH ME TO THE END OF NEW AVENUE...
WAIT HERE FOR ME, SAPT--AND KEEP THE HORSES FOR A FAST GETAWAY.
COUNT ON IT, LAD, AND BE CAREFUL.
AS EXPECTED, ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN AWAITED ME AT THE SUMMER HOUSE...
QUICKLY... THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE.
I STEPPED FORWARD, KNOWING THAT IF IT WAS A TRAP I WAS PREPARED FOR IT...


BUT THE WOMAN MERELY CLOSED THE DOOR, LEAVING THE ROOM DARKENED, AND BEGAN SPEAKING IN A RUSH OF WORDS...
I KNOW WHO YOU ARE, MR. RASSENDYLL, SO JUST LISTEN TO ME. MICHAEL FORCED ME TO WRITE THAT LETTER -- TO TRAP YOU HERE. HIS MEN FOLLOW YOU EVERYWHERE -- AND THREE OF HIS HENCHMEN WILL BE HERE IN FIFTEEN MINUTES.

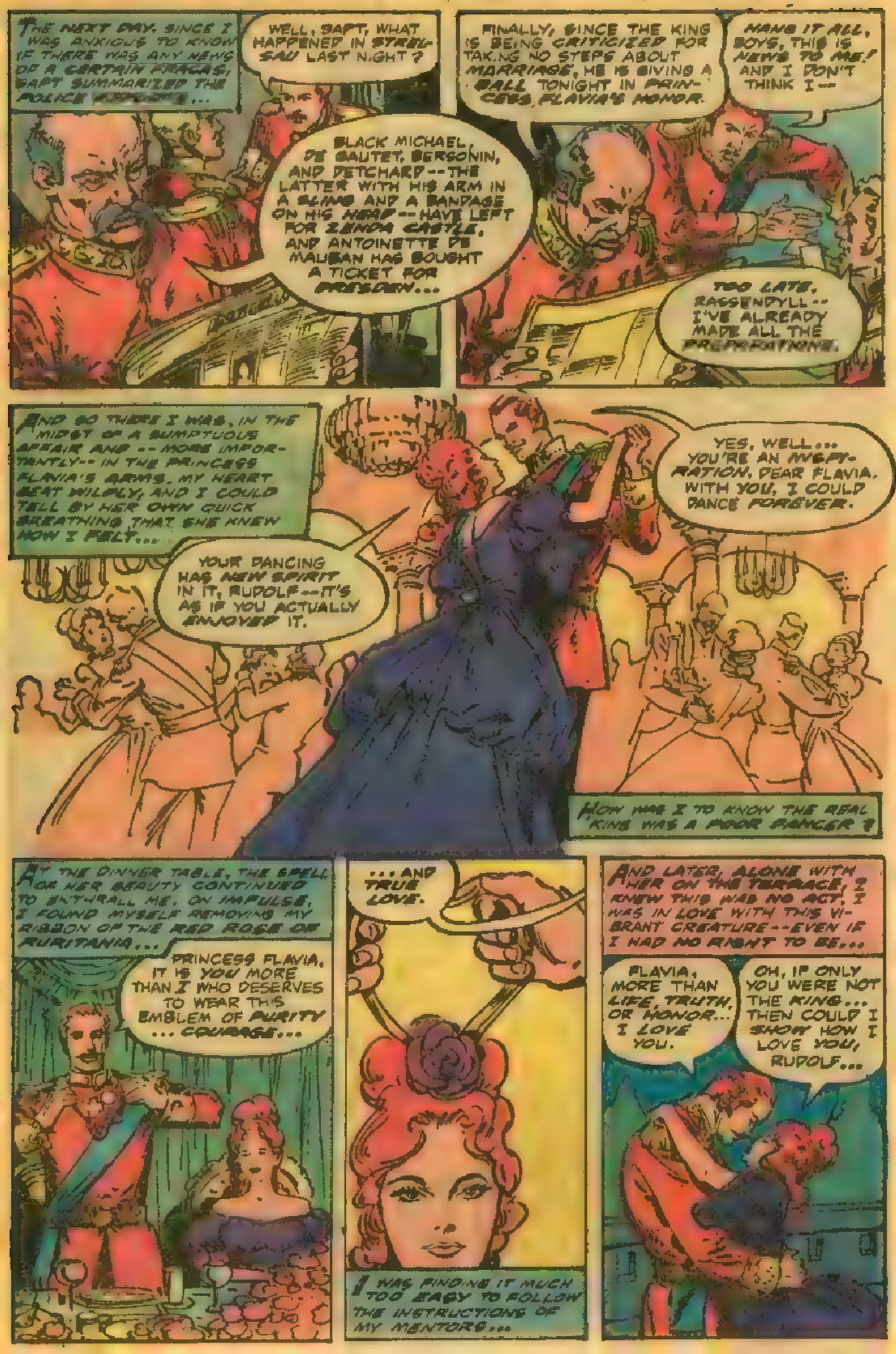
THEY MEAN TO MURDER YOU. MICHAEL WILL THEN ARREST YOUR ALLIES, ORDER THE KING'S MURDER, PROCLAIM HIMSELF THE NEW KING, AND MARRY PRINCESS FLAVIA!
A PRETTY PLOT. BUT WHY, MADAM, DO YOU--?

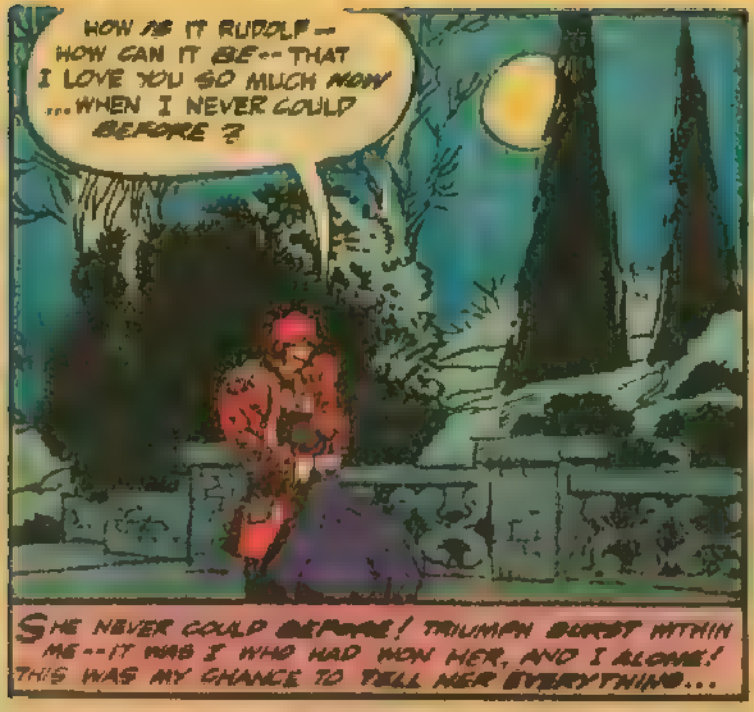

BECAUSE I LOVE BLACK MICHAEL! DO YOU THINK I WANT TO SEE HIM MARRIED TO FLAVIA? WHEN I WROTE THE NOTE, I DELIBERATELY SET THE TIME AHEAD FIFTEEN MINUTES -- TO GIVE ME TIME TO MOURN YOU.
NOW GO OUT THE BACK -- QUICKLY -- AND YOU'LL FIND A LADDER AGAINST THE WALL. GET OVER IT AND FLEE FOR YOUR VERY LIFE!


BUT IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE...
WE KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE, MR. RASSENDYLL! WE OFFER YOU SAFE CONDUCT TO THE BORDER AND FIFTY THOUSAND POUNDS IN ENGLISH CURRENCY IF YOU LEAVE RURITANIA AT ONCE!
GET BACK, MADAM. WHATEVER YOU DO, STAY AWAY FROM THE DOOR.
OBVIOUSLY, IT WAS SIMPLY A PLOY TO GAIN ENTRY TO MY MURDER...

SO I QUIETLY DREW THE BOLT ON THE DOOR, UNLOCKING, BUT NOT OPENING IT, AND CALLED OUT --
GENTLEMEN, I ACCEPT YOUR OFFER! THE DOOR IS UNLOCKED, BUT IT WON'T BUDGE -- PUT [illegible] AGAINST IT!

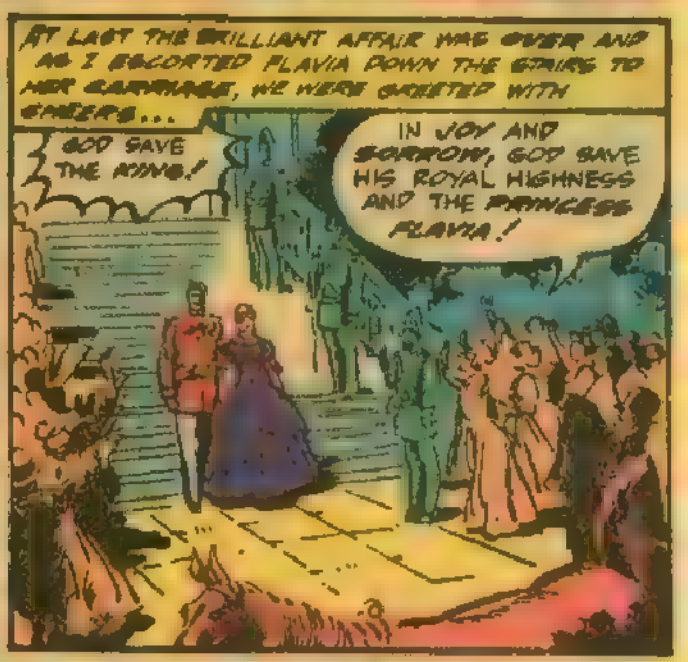
AND WHEN THEY BURST THROUGH THE DOOR WITH UNEXPECTED EASE...
...I INVITED THEM TO GATHER ROUND THE TEA TABLE
AHHN!
UHN--!
THIS SHOULD BE A LESSON TO MY MOULD-BE ASSASSINS -- AND DON'T FORGET TO SHARE IT WITH BLACK MICHAEL!
THERE'S THE LADDER-- AND THANK HEAVENS SHE WASN'T DECEIVING ME! THEY'LL BE UP AND AFTER ME IN A FEW MOMENTS...
I WAS UP AND OVER IN A FLASH -- TO FIND SAPT WAITING WITH THE HORSES...
RAGGENDYLL! THOSE SOUNDS -- I THOUGHT YOU WERE DONE FOR!
HA HA HA HA! THOSE SOUNDS WERE MUSIC, SAPT, FOR THE FINEST STORY YOU CAN IMAGINE!
WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU LAUGHING ABOUT?!
JUST THE VISION OF FOUR GENTLEMEN GATHERED FOR TEA, SAPT -- YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN IT!
AND I LAUGHED SOME MORE, LONGER AND LOUDER THAN I'D EVER LAUGHED IN MY LIFE.


THE NEXT DAY, SINCE I WAS ANXIOUS TO KNOW IF THERE WAS ANY NEWS OF A CERTAIN FRACAS, CAPT SUMMARIZED THE POLICE REPORTS...
WELL, CAPT, WHAT HAPPENED IN STRELSAU LAST NIGHT?
BLACK MICHAEL, DE GAUTET, BERGONIN, AND DETCHARD--THE LATTER WITH HIS ARM IN A SLING AND A BANDAGE ON HIS HEAD--HAVE LEFT FOR ZENDA CASTLE, AND ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN HAS BOUGHT A TICKET FOR PRESTAEN...
FINALLY, SINCE THE KING IS BEING CRITICIZED FOR TAKING NO STEPS ABOUT MARRIAGE, HE IS GIVING A BALL TONIGHT IN PRINCESS FLAVIA'S HONOR.
HANG IT ALL, BOYS, THIS IS NEWS TO ME! AND I DON'T THINK I--
TOO LATE, RASSENDYLL--I'VE ALREADY MADE ALL THE PREPARATIONS.
AND SO THERE I WAS, IN THE MIDST OF A SUMPTUOUS AFFAIR AND--MORE IMPORTANTLY--IN THE PRINCESS FLAVIA'S ARMS, MY HEART BEAT WILDLY, AND I COULD TELL BY HER OWN QUICK BREATHING THAT SHE KNEW HOW I FELT...
YOUR DANCING HAS NEW SPIRIT IN IT, RUDOLF--IT'S AS IF YOU ACTUALLY ENJOYED IT.
YES, WELL... YOU'RE AN INSPIRATION, DEAR FLAVIA. WITH YOU, I COULD DANCE FOREVER.
HOW WAS I TO KNOW THE REAL KING WAS A POOR DANCER?
AT THE DINNER TABLE, THE SPELL OF HER BEAUTY CONTINUED TO ENTHRALL ME. ON IMPULSE, I FOUND MYSELF REMOVING MY RIBBON OF THE RED ROSE OF RURITANIA...
PRINCESS FLAVIA, IT IS YOU MORE THAN I WHO DESERVES TO WEAR THIS EMBLEM OF PURITY ... COURAGE...
...AND TRUE LOVE.
I WAS FINDING IT MUCH TOO EASY TO FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS OF MY MENTORS...
AND LATER, ALONE WITH HER ON THE TERRACE, I KNEW THIS WAS NO ACT. I WAS IN LOVE WITH THIS VIBRANT CREATURE--EVEN IF I HAD NO RIGHT TO BE...
FLAVIA, MORE THAN LIFE, TRUTH, OR HONOR... I LOVE YOU.
OH, IF ONLY YOU WERE NOT THE KING... THEN COULD I SHOW HOW I LOVE YOU, RUDOLF...

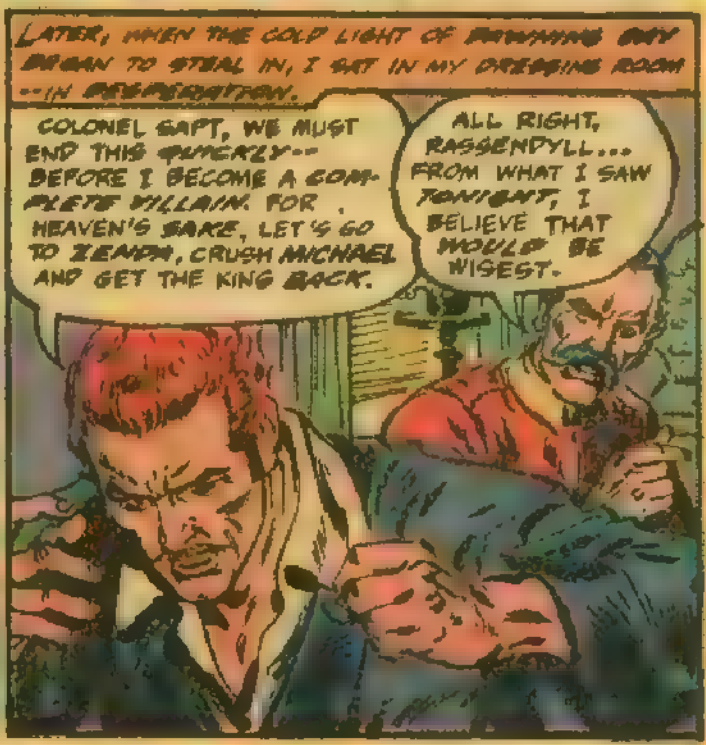

HOW IS IT RUDOLF -- HOW CAN IT BE -- THAT I LOVE YOU SO MUCH NOW ...WHEN I NEVER COULD BEFORE ?
SHE NEVER COULD BEFORE! TRIUMPH BURST WITHIN ME -- IT WAS I WHO HAD WON HER, AND I ALONE! THIS WAS MY CHANCE TO TELL HER EVERYTHING...

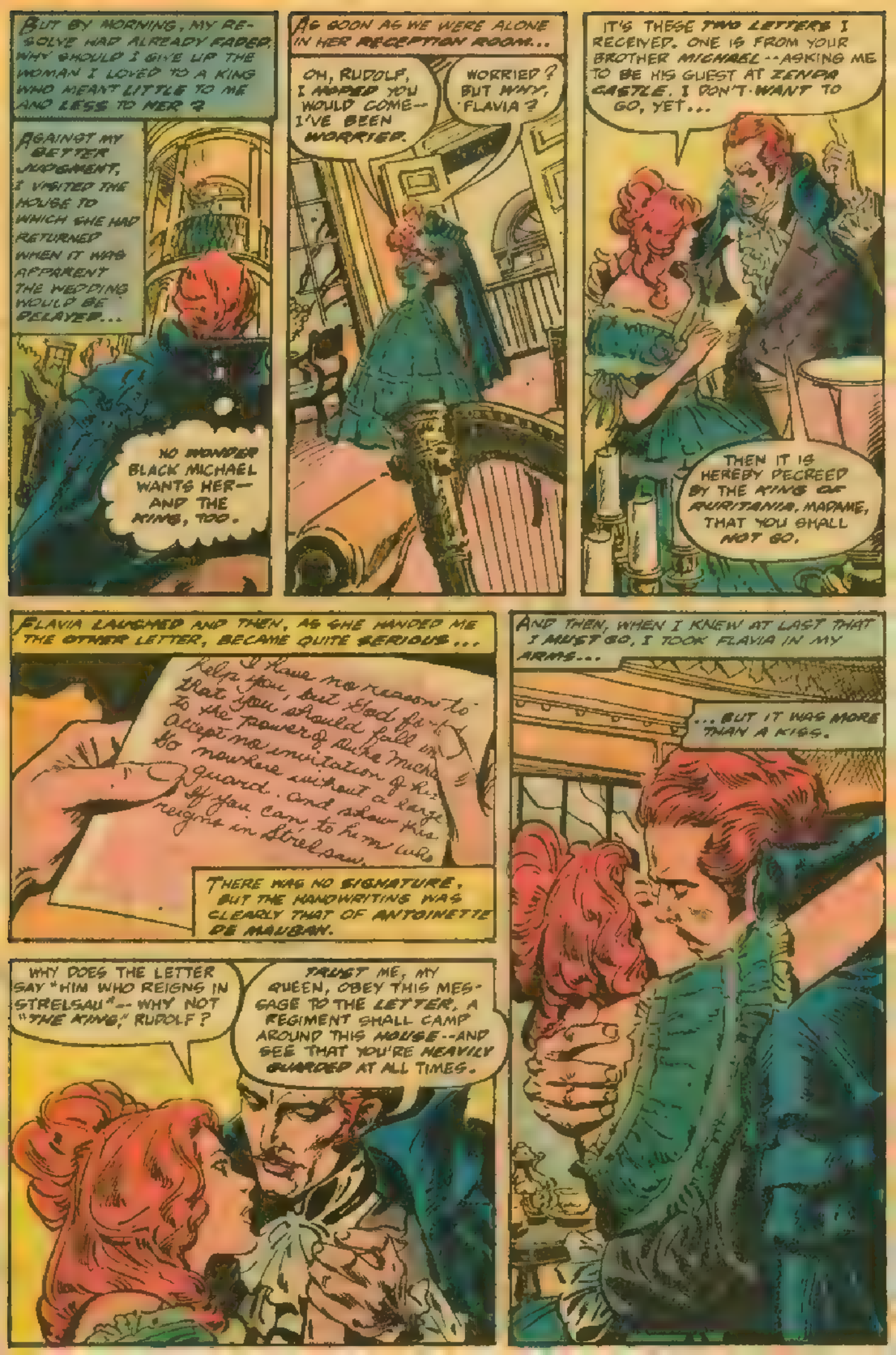
I LED HER TO A SEAT AND, HOLDING HER HANDS IN MINE, DROPPED TO MY KNEE BE
FLAVIA, IF I WERE NOT THE KING... IF I WERE ONLY A COMMONER, I... FLAVIA, I HARDLY KNOW HOW TO TELL YOU... BUT I... I'M NOT --
YOUR HIGHNESS ? AHEM...

HOW LONG SAPT HAD BEEN LISTENING I KNEW NOT... BUT HE INTERRUPTED ME JUST IN THE NICK OF TIME...
A THOUSAND PARDONS, SIRE, BUT HIS EMINENCE THE CARDINAL HAS BEEN WAITING TO BID ADIEU TO YOUR MAJESTY.
YES -- COME, FLAVIA. WE MUST NOT KEEP HIS EMINENCE WAITING.


AT LAST THE BRILLIANT AFFAIR WAS OVER AND AS I ESCORTED FLAVIA DOWN THE STEPS TO HER CARRIAGE, WE WERE GREETED WITH CHEERS...
GOD SAVE THE KING!
IN JOY AND SORROW, GOD SAVE HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS AND THE PRINCESS FLAVIA!

WILL YOU KEEP THIS ROSE AS A TOKEN OF WONDERFUL NIGHT, RUDOLF?
I SHALL TREASURE IT ALWAYS, FLAVIA, REMEMBERING THAT ITS FRAGRANCE CANNOT COMPARE WITH THE SWEETNESS OF THE ONE FROM WHOM IT CAME.
I WAS DRUNK, FOR I HAD FACED STRELSAU AS THE KING AND ACCEPTED GUILT OF THE PRINCESS FLAVIA. NOW, MY LOVE FOR HER HAD FORCED ME ON, AND THE WAY BACK WAS CLOSED BEHIND ME.

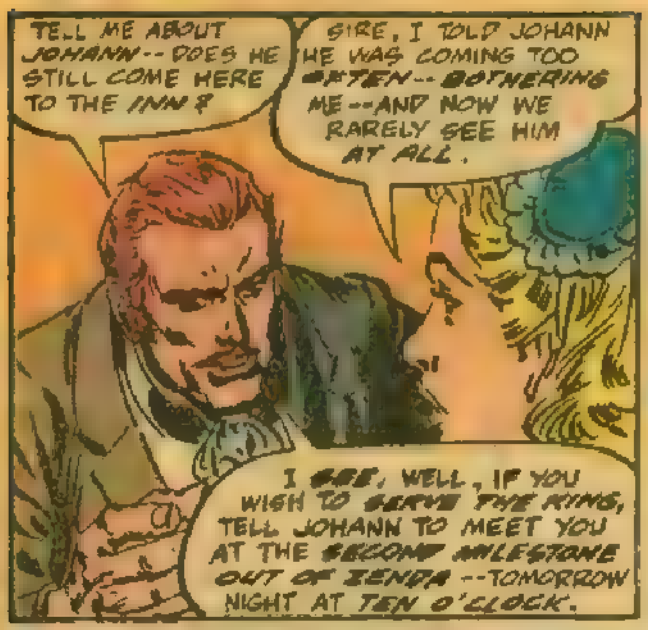

LATER, WHEN THE COLD LIGHT OF DAWNING DAY BEGAN TO STEAL IN, I SAT IN MY DRESSING ROOM --IN DESPERATION.
COLONEL SAPT, WE MUST END THIS DUEL-- BEFORE I BECOME A COMPLETE VILLAIN. FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, LET'S GO TO ZENDA, CRUSH MICHAEL AND GET THE KING BACK.
ALL RIGHT, RASSENDYLL... FROM WHAT I SAW TONIGHT, I BELIEVE THAT WOULD BE WISEST.

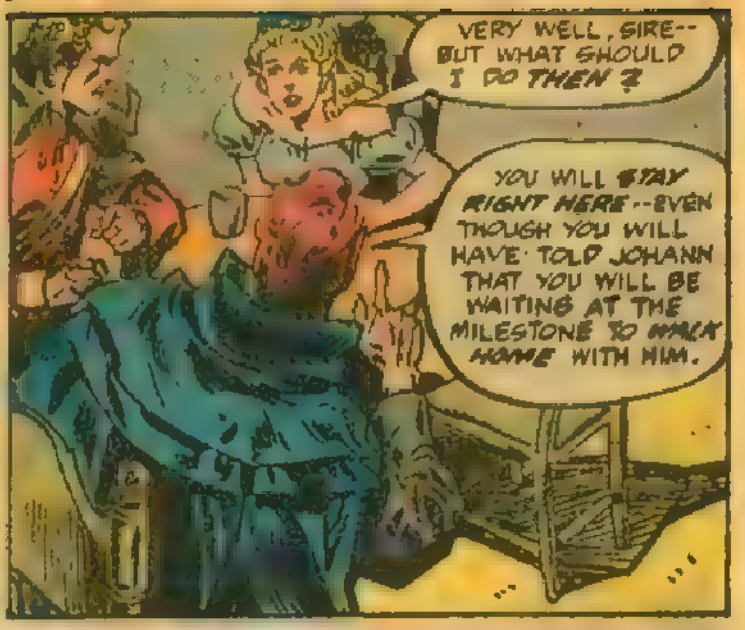

BUT BY MORNING, MY RESOLVE HAD ALREADY FADED. WHY SHOULD I GIVE UP THE WOMAN I LOVED TO A KING WHO MEANT LITTLE TO ME AND LESS TO HER?
AGAINST MY BETTER JUDGMENT, I VISITED THE HOUSE TO WHICH SHE HAD RETURNED WHEN IT WAS APPARENT THE WEDDING WOULD BE DELAYED...
NO WONDER BLACK MICHAEL WANTS HER— AND THE KING, TOO.
AS SOON AS WE WERE ALONE IN HER RECEPTION ROOM...
OH, RUDOLF, I HOPED YOU WOULD COME— I'VE BEEN WORRIED.
WORRIED? BUT WHY, FLAVIA?
IT'S THESE TWO LETTERS I RECEIVED. ONE IS FROM YOUR BROTHER MICHAEL--ASKING ME TO BE HIS GUEST AT ZENDA CASTLE. I DON'T WANT TO GO, YET...
THEN IT IS HEREBY DECREED BY THE KING OF RURITANIA, MADAME, THAT YOU SHALL NOT GO.
FLAVIA LAUGHED AND THEN, AS SHE HANDED ME THE OTHER LETTER, BECAME QUITE SERIOUS...
I have no reason to help you, but God forbid that you should fall into the power of Duke Michael. Accept no invitation of his. Go nowhere without a large guard. And show this letter to him who reigns in Strelsau.
THERE WAS NO SIGNATURE, BUT THE HANDWRITING WAS CLEARLY THAT OF ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN.
AND THEN, WHEN I KNEW AT LAST THAT I MUST GO, I TOOK FLAVIA IN MY ARMS...
...BUT IT WAS MORE THAN A KISS.
WHY DOES THE LETTER SAY "HIM WHO REIGNS IN STRELSAU"-- WHY NOT "THE KING," RUDOLF?
TRUST ME, MY QUEEN, OBEY THIS MESSAGE TO THE LETTER. A REGIMENT SHALL CAMP AROUND THIS HOUSE--AND SEE THAT YOU'RE HEAVILY GUARDED AT ALL TIMES.

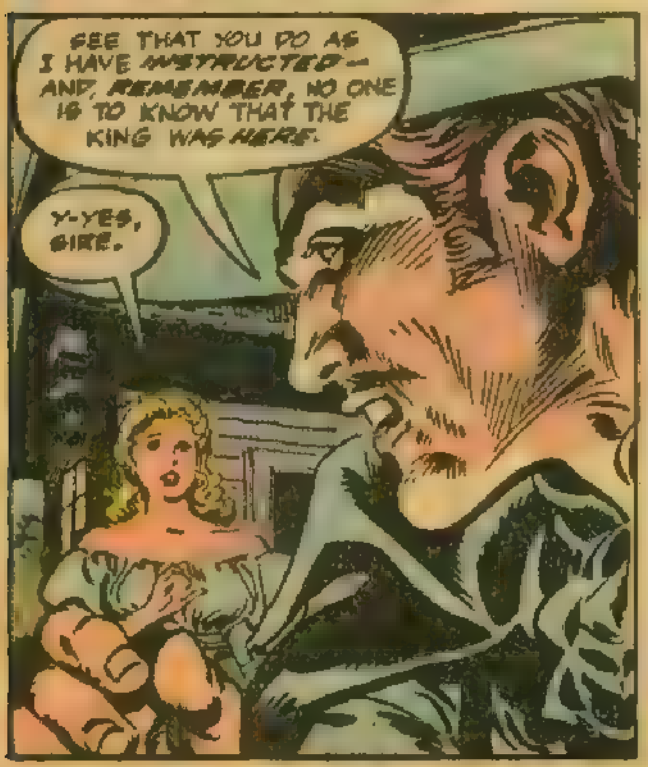
I HAD TO TEAR MYSELF AWAY FROM HER, FOR I KNEW THAT TO LINGER ANY LONGER WOULD WEAKEN ALL MY GOOD RESOLVE.
I WENT STRAIGHT TO THE HOME OF MARSHAL STRAKENCZ...
I'M LEAVING STRELSAU FOR A FEW DAYS, MARSHAL, AND I'M PLACING THE SAFETY OF PRINCESS FLAVIA IN YOUR HANDS.
LET NO ONE APPROACH HER -- ESPECIALLY NOT DUKE MICHAEL OR ANY OF HIS MEN.
I UNDERSTAND, SIRE -- I SHALL GUARD HER PERSONALLY.
I'LL SEND COURIERS TO YOU EVERY DAY. IF NONE APPEARS FOR THREE DAYS, YOU WILL ASSUME THE KING IS DEAD AND PROCLAIM THE PRINCESS FLAVIA AS QUEEN.
YOU'VE BEEN A WISE ALLY AND A BRAVE MAN, SIRE. I PRAY YOU KEEP YOURSELF SAFE ON THIS MISSION.
THANK YOU, STRAKENCZ. LET IT BE GENERALLY KNOWN THAT I'VE GONE BOAR HUNTING.
YES, SIRE, AND MAY GOD GRANT YOU SUCCESS IN YOUR... HUNT.
MAINTAINING THE PRETENSE OUR PARTY JOURNEYED TO TARLENHEIM CASTLE, FRITZ'S FAMILY ESTATE WHICH WAS SITUATED ACROSS THE VALLEY FROM ZENDA CASTLE...
I WAS ACCOMPANIED BY CAPT. FRITZ, AND TEN MEN WHO KNEW ONLY THAT MY LIFE WAS IN DANGER AND THAT SOMEONE WAS TO BE RESCUED FROM ZENDA CASTLE...
WHILE STRAKENCZ KNEW NOTHING OF MY MASQUERADE, HE GREATLY DISTRUSTED BLACK MICHAEL AND WELL UNDERSTOOD THE URGENCY OF MY SITUATION.

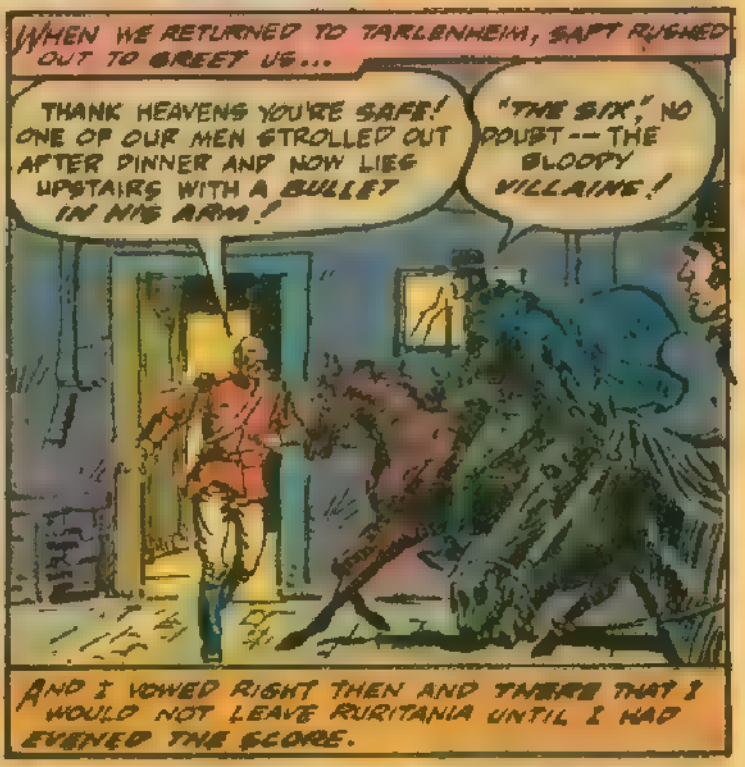
WELCOME TO TARLENHEIM, SIRE!
THANK YOU, FRITZ, BUT I'M AFRAID WE MUST BEGIN AT ONCE TO PLAN OUR STRATEGY FOR RESCUING THE PRISONER OF ZENDA.
BY NOW, BLACK MICHAEL MUST KNOW WE'RE HERE. ALL OF "THE SIX" ARE ACROSS THE VALLEY AT ZENDA AND WILL BE WATCHING EVERY MOVE WE MAKE.
THUS, THE SAFETY OF THE PRISONER MUST BE OUR FIRST CONSIDERATION.
OF COURSE, FRITZ, BUT--
EXCUSE ME, SIRS...
WE HAD NOT BEEN AT TARLENHEIM FOR EVEN AN HOUR, WHEN --
THERE ARE THREE VISITORS TO SEE YOUR MAJESTY, ANNOUNCING THEMSELVES AS LAUENGRAM, KRAFSTEIN AND RUPERT HENTZAU.
THE OTHER THREE OF "THE SIX"! THEY'LL WANT TO RECOGNIZE US THEN WE MEET IN THE FUTURE, BUT THAT CAN WORK BOTH WAYS. SHOW THEM IN.
AS THEY ENTERED, IT WAS RUPERT HENTZAU WHO IMMEDIATELY DEMANDED THE MOST ATTENTION...
WELCOME TO TARLENHEIM, GENTLEMEN. YOU MUST DINE WITH US AND TELL US ANY NEWS OF MY BROTHER MICHAEL.
URGENT DUTIES AT ZENDA CASTLE PREVENT OUR ACCEPTANCE, YOUR "MAJESTY"
DUKE MICHAEL PRAYS THAT YOU WILL PARDON HIM FOR NOT GREETING YOU IN PERSON, BUT SCARLET FEVER RAGES AT ZENDA...
...AND HE WOULD NOT... EXPOSE YOU.
NEVERTHELESS, MAY WE SOON BECOME BETTER ACQUAINTED.
THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE JEERING SCORN IN HENTZAU'S ARROGANT FACE THAT MADE ME REALIZE THAT OUR PLAN MUST BE SET IN MOTION AT ONCE.

INDEED, AS SOON AS OUR UNSETTLING GUEST HAD GONE, I TOOK HASTY CONSULTATION WITH CAPT AND FRITZ...
...AND WHEN A SCHEME HAD BEEN FORMULATED...
THE REST OF YOU GENTLEMEN MUST EXCUSE FRITZ AND ME FROM DINNER. WE HAVE AN ERRAND TO RUN AT THE INN AT ZENDA.
AND SOON WE ARRIVED AT THAT PLACE WHENCE MY ENTIRE ADVENTURE HAD BEGUN...
TELL THE INNKEEPER THAT WE ARE ON THE KING'S HOUSEHOLD AND THAT I AM SUFFERING FROM A SEVERE TOOTHACHE. ORDER A PRIVATE ROOM AND DINNER FOR TWO.
BUT IF YOU STAYED HERE BEFORE, THEY'LL RECOGNIZE YOU.
NOT IF I PROTECT MY ACHING TOOTH FROM THE COLD NIGHT AIR, FRITZ. NOW ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS PERSUADE THE PRETTY DAUGHTER TO SERVE US IN OUR ROOM.
WELL, I'LL CERTAINLY DO MY BEST, RASSENDYLL.
USHERED INTO A PRIVATE ROOM, I REMOVED MY DISGUISE AND WAITED FOR THE INNKEEPER'S DAUGHTER TO ENTER. SHE ALMOST DROPPED OUR MEAL...
OH! THE KING -- THEN IT WAS THE KING WHO WAS HERE BEFORE, WEARING A BEARD! FORGIVE ME, SIRE, FOR THE THINGS I SAID BEFORE! I MUST TELL MOTHER--!
NO -- NOT A WORD OF THE KING'S PRESENCE HERE. NOW TAKE A SEAT SO I CAN TALK TO YOU...

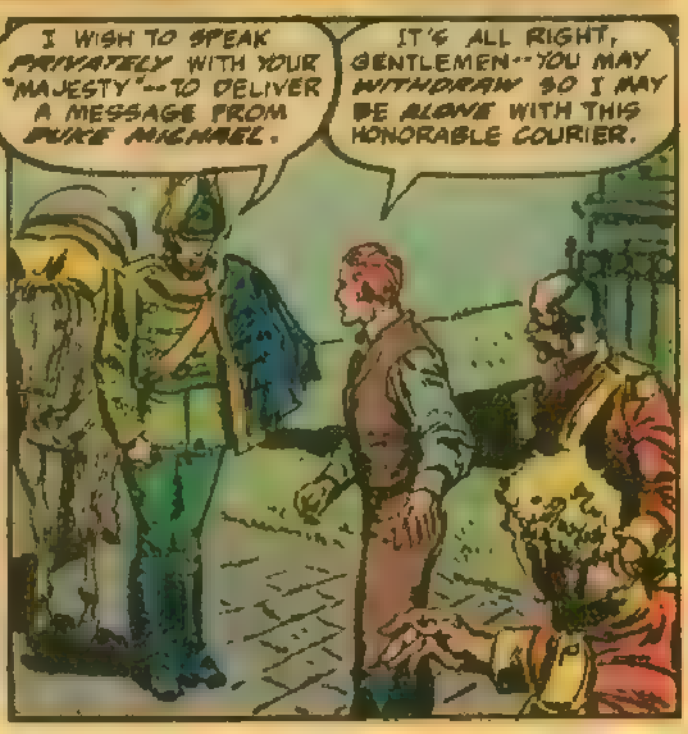

TELL ME ABOUT JOHANN -- DOES HE STILL COME HERE TO THE INN?
SIRE, I TOLD JOHANN HE WAS COMING TOO OFTEN -- BOTHERING ME -- AND NOW WE RARELY SEE HIM AT ALL.
I SEE. WELL, IF YOU WISH TO SERVE THE KING, TELL JOHANN TO MEET YOU AT THE SECOND MILESTONE OUT OF ZENDA -- TOMORROW NIGHT AT TEN O'CLOCK.

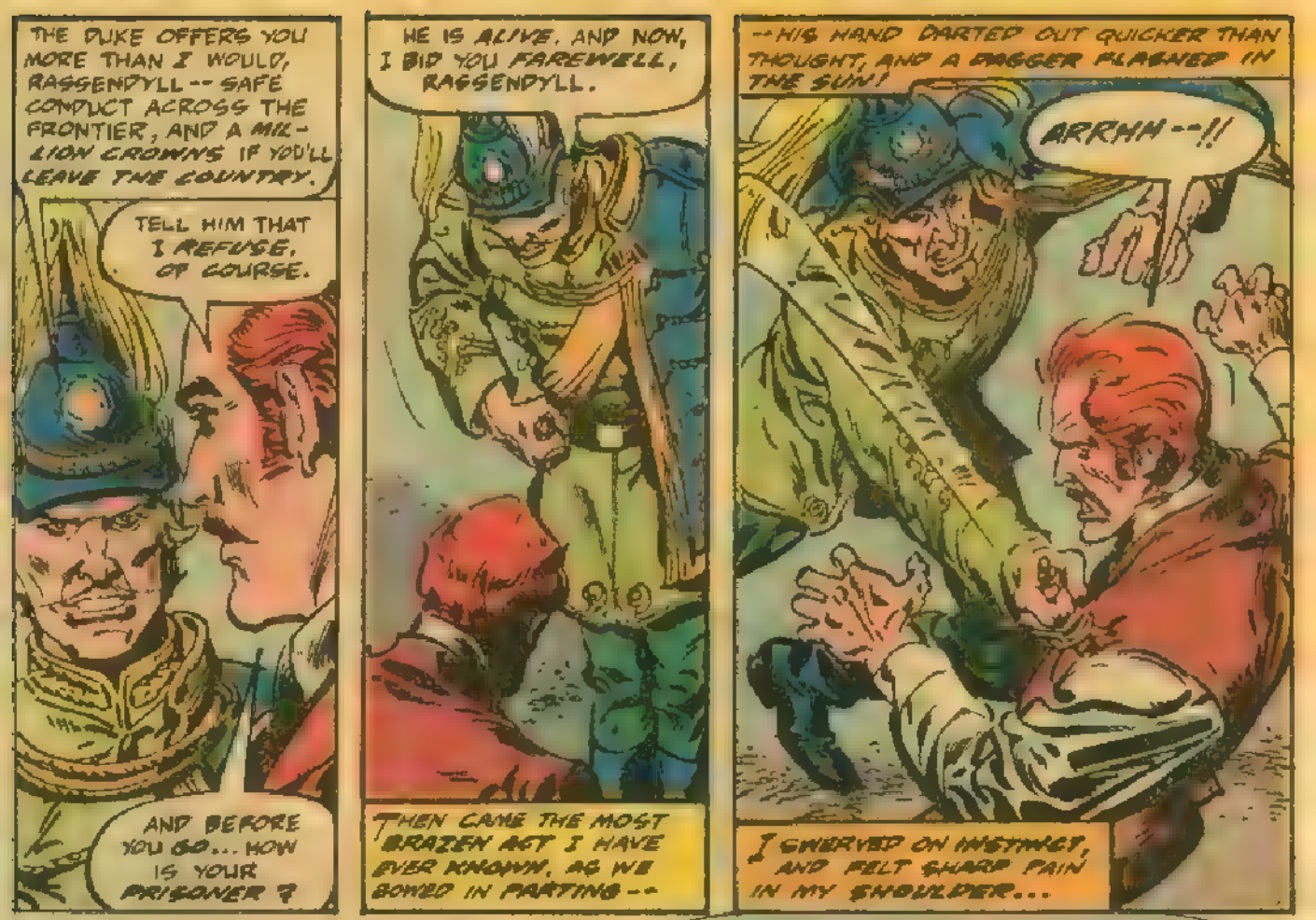

VERY WELL, SIRE -- BUT WHAT SHOULD I DO THEN?
YOU WILL STAY RIGHT HERE -- EVEN THOUGH YOU WILL HAVE TOLD JOHANN THAT YOU WILL BE WAITING AT THE MILESTONE TO WALK HOME WITH HIM.

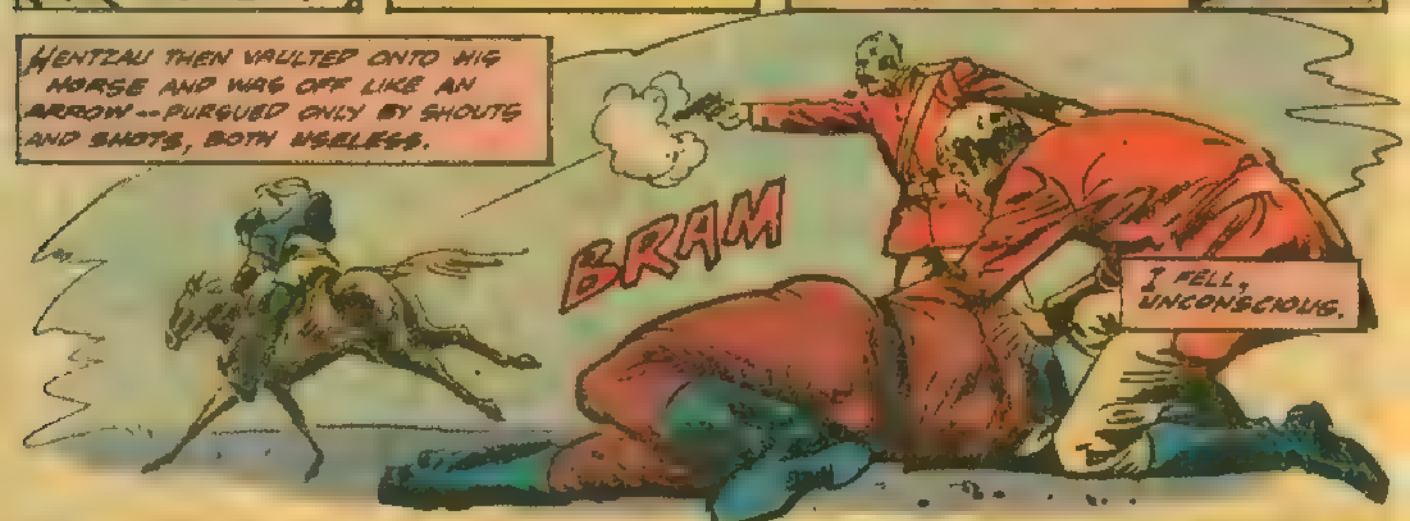

SEE THAT YOU DO AS I HAVE INSTRUCTED -- AND, REMEMBER, NO ONE IS TO KNOW THAT THE KING WAS HERE.
Y-YES, SIRE.

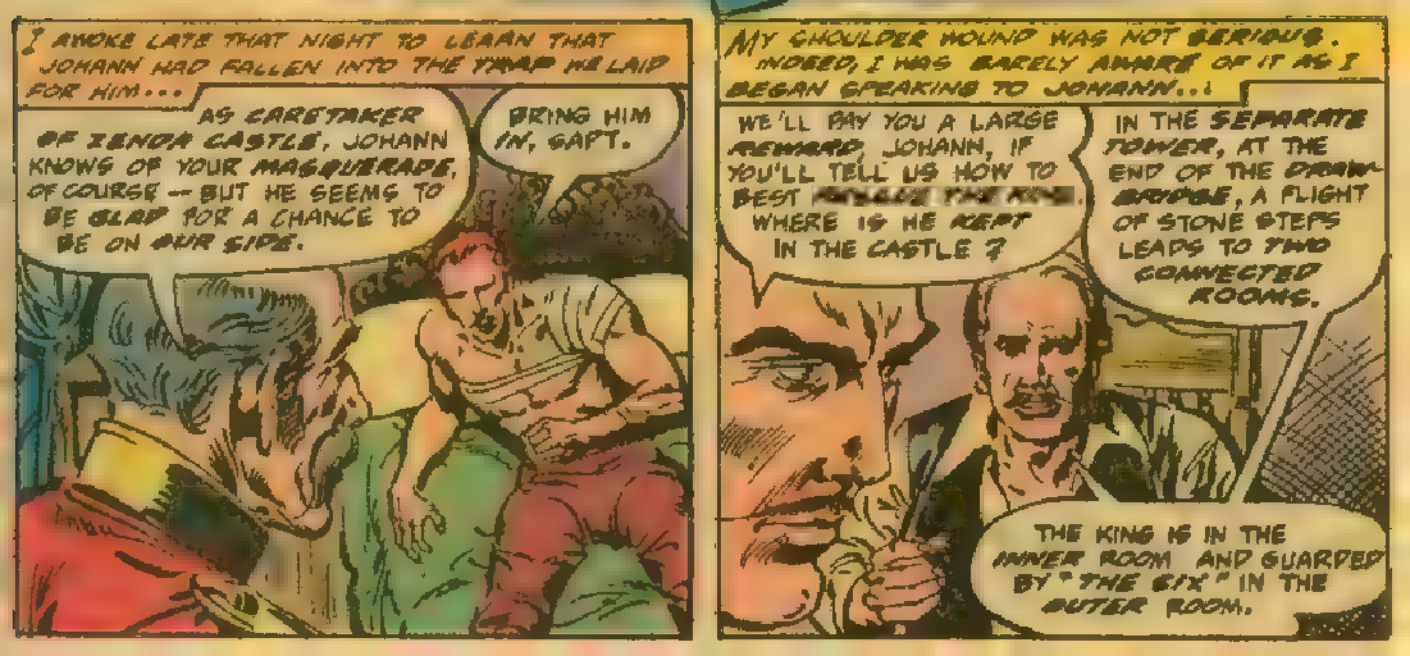

WHEN WE RETURNED TO TARLENHEIM, SAPT RUSHED OUT TO GREET US...
THANK HEAVENS YOU'RE SAFE! ONE OF OUR MEN STROLLED OUT AFTER DINNER AND NOW LIES UPSTAIRS WITH A BULLET IN HIS ARM!
"THE SIX", NO DOUBT -- THE BLOODY VILLAINS!
AND I VOWED RIGHT THEN AND THERE THAT I WOULD NOT LEAVE RURITANIA UNTIL I HAD EVENED THE SCORE.

BUT ON THE FOLLOWING DAY, AS WE ENJOYED THE SUNSHINE IN TARLENHEIM'S PRIVATE PARK, THERE CAME THE SOUND OF HOOFBEATS...
AS I LIVE AND BREATHE, IT'S RUPERT HENTZAU! THE AUDACITY OF THE MAN!


I WISH TO SPEAK PRIVATELY WITH YOUR "MAJESTY" -- TO DELIVER A MESSAGE FROM DUKE MICHAEL.
IT'S ALL RIGHT, GENTLEMEN -- YOU MAY WITHDRAW SO I MAY BE ALONE WITH THIS HONORABLE COURIER.


THE DUKE OFFERS YOU MORE THAN I WOULD, RASSENDYLL -- SAFE CONDUCT ACROSS THE FRONTIER, AND A MILLION CROWNS IF YOU'LL LEAVE THE COUNTRY.
TELL HIM THAT I REFUSE, OF COURSE.
AND BEFORE YOU GO... HOW IS YOUR PRISONER ?
HE IS ALIVE. AND NOW, I BID YOU FAREWELL, RASSENDYLL.
THEN CAME THE MOST BRAZEN ACT I HAVE EVER KNOWN, AS WE BOWED IN PARTING --
--HIS HAND DARTED OUT QUICKER THAN THOUGHT, AND A DAGGER FLASHED IN THE SUN!
ARRMH --!!
I SWERVED ON INSTINCT, AND FELT SHARP PAIN IN MY SHOULDER...


HENTZAU THEN VAULTED ONTO HIS HORSE AND WAS OFF LIKE AN ARROW -- PURSUED ONLY BY SHOUTS AND SHOTS, BOTH USELESS.
BRAM
I FELL, UNCONSCIOUS.


I AWOKE LATE THAT NIGHT TO LEARN THAT JOHANN HAD FALLEN INTO THE TRAP HE LAID FOR HIM...
AS CARETAKER OF ZENDA CASTLE, JOHANN KNOWS OF YOUR MASQUERADE, OF COURSE -- BUT HE SEEMS TO BE GLAD FOR A CHANCE TO BE ON OUR SIDE.
BRING HIM IN, CAPT.
MY SHOULDER WOUND WAS NOT SERIOUS. INDEED, I WAS BARELY AWARE OF IT AS I BEGAN SPEAKING TO JOHANN...
WE'LL PAY YOU A LARGE REWARD, JOHANN, IF YOU'LL TELL US HOW TO BEST RESCUE THE KING. WHERE IS HE KEPT IN THE CASTLE ?
IN THE SEPARATE TOWER, AT THE END OF THE DRAW-BRIDGE, A FLIGHT OF STONE STEPS LEADS TO TWO CONNECTED ROOMS.
THE KING IS IN THE INNER ROOM AND GUARDED BY "THE SIX" IN THE OUTER ROOM.

SHOULD IT BE NECESSARY TO DISPOSE OF THE KING, "THE SIX" NEED ONLY TO REMOVE THE BARS OF HIS CELL WINDOW AND FORCE HIS WEIGHTED BODY THROUGH THE OPENING INTO A LARGE EARTHENWARE PIPE -- KNOWN AS JACOB'S LADDER -- WHICH LEADS DOWN INTO THE MOAT.
IN OTHER WORDS THE KING WOULD DROWN.
EXCELLENT, JOHANN -- HERE'S YOUR REWARD. BUT REMEMBER -- NOT A WORD TO ANYONE CONCERNING THE PRISONER OF ZENDA.
THANK YOU, SIR, THANK YOU -- AND MAY GOD AID YOUR MISSION!
AFTER OUR INFORMER HAD DEPARTED, SAPT AND I SCHEMED FAR INTO THE NIGHT...
FURTHERMORE, JOHANN CLAIMED THAT THE KING'S HEALTH IS BREAKING DOWN.
THEN WE MUST ACT, SAPT -- AND ACT QUICKLY.
THE NEXT DAY I FELT WELL ENOUGH TO LEAVE MY BED -- THOUGH I RECEIVED A SHOCK WHICH VERY NEARLY LAID ME OUT AGAIN...
MARSHAL STRAKENZ HAS BROUGHT A FAIR VISITOR TO SEE YOU, SIRE -- NONE OTHER THAN THE PRINCESS FLAVIA.
GOOD HEAVENS! HOW ON EARTH...?!
THEN SHE WAS KNEELING BEFORE ME, AND ALL ELSE BUT HER SWEET PRESENCE WAS FORGOTTEN...
O, MY DARLING -- IN ONE BREATH I CHASTISE YOU FOR COMING, YET IN THE NEXT I THANK GOD YOU'RE HERE!
WORD CAME TO STRELSAU OF YOUR INJURY, RUPOLF, AND I BECAME A SHREW AND A VIXEN UNTIL THEY AGREED TO BRING ME HERE.
UNDER FLAVIA'S GENTLE CARE, AND IN THE PRESENCE OF HER SOOTHING AND INSPIRING BEAUTY, I FELT MYSELF RECOVERING QUICKLY...
AND, TOO, I PUSHED MYSELF, KNOWING I MUST STRIKE SOON...

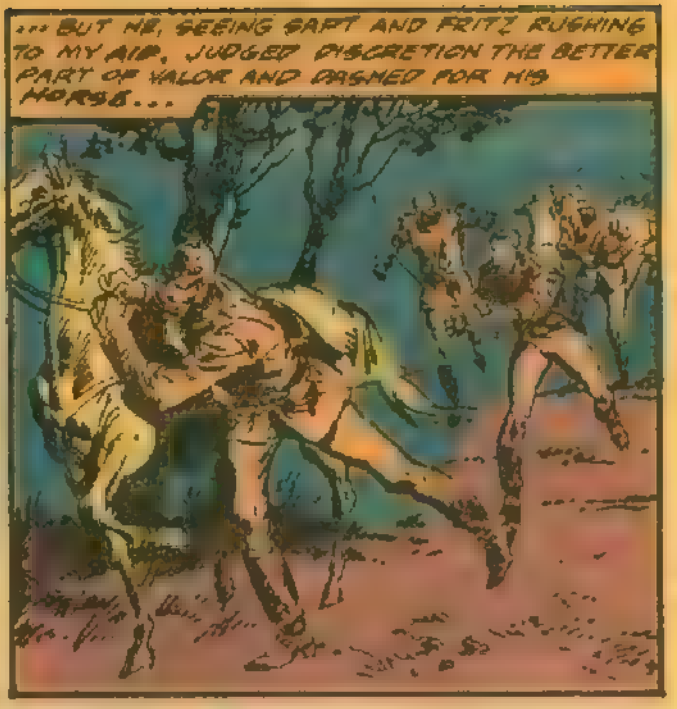
ONE EVENING SEVERAL DAYS LATER, I ESCORTED FLAVIA TO HER GUEST ROOM, BUT, UNABLE TO TELL HER THAT TONIGHT WAS THE NIGHT, I ASKED HER INSTEAD...
WILL YOU PROMISE TO WEAR THIS RING, FLAVIA -- MY RING -- EVEN THOUGH YOU MUST WEAR ANOTHER RING UPON BECOMING QUEEN?
I WILL WEAR THIS RING UNTIL I DIE, RUDOLF...
...AND EVEN AFTER I DIE.
I FORCED MYSELF TO STALK AWAY FROM HER, KNOWING THAT IF I SO MUCH AS FALTERED I WOULD TURN BACK. GAST AND FRITZ WERE STANDING GUARD IN THE COURTYARD...
GET THREE MEN AND THE HORSES -- THIS IS THE NIGHT.
WE CIRCLED THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE TOWN AND THENCE UP THE HILL TOWARD THE DARK AND MENACING SPECTER OF ERWPA CASTLE.
AND SO BEGAN THE WAR BETWEEN THE KING'S BROTHER AND THE KING'S IMPERSONATOR -- A WAR OVER THE LIFE OF THE KING HIMSELF.
WE DISMOUNTED A QUARTER MILE FROM THE CASTLE.
WAIT HERE WITH THE HORSES. IF YOU HEAR A WHISTLE, IT MEANS WE NEED YOUR HELP.
YES, SIRE.

WE PROCEEDED ON FOOT TO THE EDGE OF THE MOAT, WHERE SAPT ANCHORED HIS ROPE TO A TREE...
GOOD, SAPT-- NOW I'LL HAVE A LOOK AT THIS "JACOB'S LADDER."
IN GREAT STEALTH, I LOWERED MYSELF INTO THE WATER...
...AND BEGAN SWIMMING FOR THE SEPARATE TOWER.
THE LIGHTS FROM THE CHATEAU ARE A HELP... AS LONG AS THEY DON'T SHOW TOO MUCH OF ME.
I FOUND THE PIPE EASILY ENOUGH-- A CRUEL JEST, CALLING IT JACOB'S LADDER -- AND REALIZED WITH SHOCK HOW CLOSE I MUST BE TO THE KING... HOW CLOSE AND YET SO FAR AWAY.
THEN I NOTICED A VAGUE SHAPE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PIPE...
IT WAS A SMALL BOAT, AND IN IT SAT A SLEEPING MAN...
IT MUST BE JOHANN'S BROTHER -- MAX WOLF, JOHANN WARNED THAT HE WOULD BE ON GUARD HERE, AND THAT HIS LOYALTY TO BLACK MICHAEL EXTENDS TO THE DEATH...

I TOLD MYSELF IT WAS WAR -- HIS LIFE OR MINE -- AND THAT THE KING'S LIFE WAS AT STAKE -- AS WELL AS THE FATE OF AN ENTIRE KINGDOM...
... BUT I STILL FELT MISERABLE. WHETHER I HAD ANY CHOICE OR NOT, THE DEED WAS WRETCHED.
STILL, THERE WAS LITTLE TIME FOR CONCIENCE OR ANGUISH. I QUICKLY RETURNED TO JACOB'S LADDER AND PRESSED MY EAR AGAINST THE PIPE...
YES -- TELL MY BROTHER THAT I BEG HIM TO KILL ME... I... I'M DYING BY INCHES HERE...
HAVE YOU ANYTHING TO ASK BEFORE I GO ?
TWO VOICES -- PETCHARD'S AND THE KING'S ! NOW WE HAD TO MAKE HASTE...
I DID NOT TRY TO SPEAK TO THE KING, KNOWING THAT THE RISK WAS TOO GREAT...
BESIDES, I HAD ACCOMPLISHED MY MISSION -- LEARNING THE LAYOUT OF THE KING'S PRISON AND OPENING THE WAY FOR RESCUE.
BUT AS I WAS RETURNING FOR THE OTHERS, I HEARD A VOICE CRYING OUT FROM THE VICINITY OF THE CHATEAU -- CALLING TO THE DEAD MAN IN MY BOAT...
MAX ! MAX HOLF -- ARE YOU THERE ? ! WHERE ARE YOU GOING -- ? !
HE THINKS I'M MAX HOLF -- AND WHEN I DON'T ANSWER, THEY'LL COME [redacted]
I ROWED HARDER.

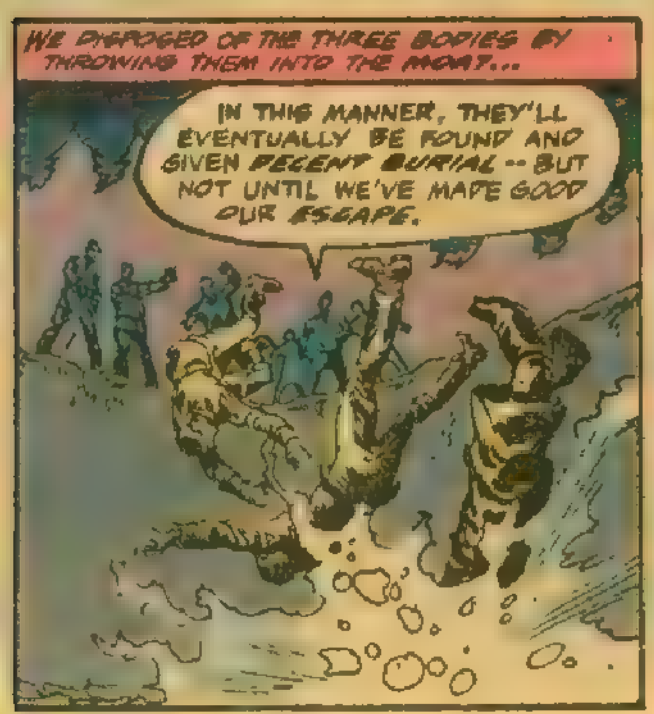
REACHING THE WALL, I TIED THE ROPE AROUND MAX HOLF'S BODY, AS CAPT AND FRITZ HOISTED IT UP, I HEARD THE SOUNDS OF HORSEMEN CROSSING THE CHATEAU'S MAIN DRAWBRIDGE...
HURRY... THEY'RE COMING!
AND WHEN THEY'D TOGGED THE ROPE BACK DOWN TO ME...
GIVE A WHISTLE FOR OUR MEN, CAPT, BUT DON'T TALK -- THERE'S STILL A CHANCE THEY MIGHT NOT FIND US HERE IN THE DARK...
IT WAS THREE OF "THE SIX," APPARENTLY, AND AFTER THEY'D SEARCHED THE AREA FOR SOME TIME, IT SEEMED THEY WOULD NOT FIND US...
... UNTIL OUR MEN, RESPONDING TO CAPT'S WHISTLE, BURST FROM THE WOODS WITH A SHOUT...
COME ON, MEN-- -- GET THEM!!
I HEARD GRUNTS IN DISMAY...
... BUT IT WAS TOO LATE NOW FOR ANYTHING BUT A FIGHT.
COME ON, CAPT... FRITZ... HERE'S A CHANCE TO TAKE THE VILLAINS!

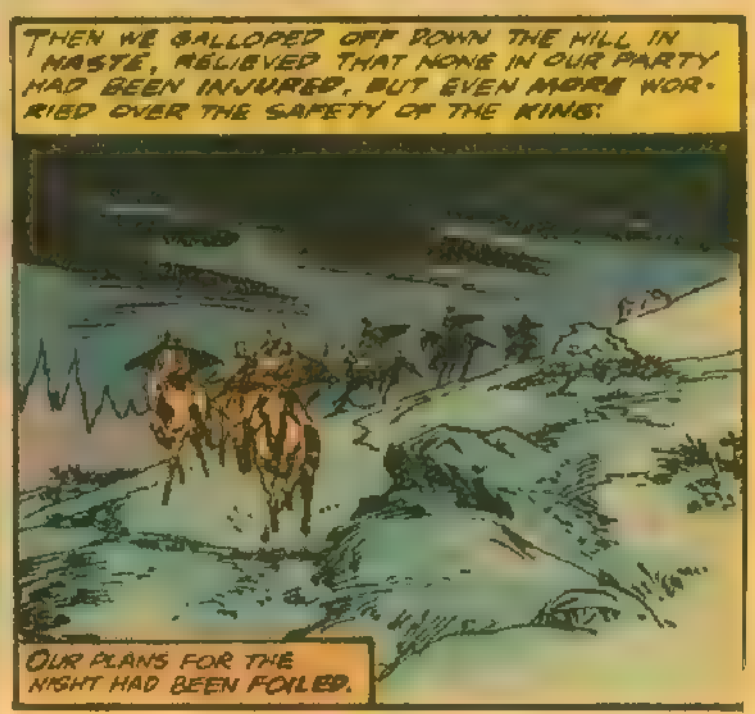
THERE FOLLOWED A BRIEF, BUT EXTREMELY FIERCE, ENCOUNTER...
AT LAST, RUPERT HENTZAU -- WE MEET AGAIN!
HA-HA-HA! IF IT ISN'T MY OLD FRIEND THE PLAY ACTOR!
FOR A WHILE I THOUGHT I HAD HENTZAU AND WOULD REPAY HIM FOR HIS BASE ATTACK WITH THE DAGGER...


...BUT HE, SEEING SAPT AND FRITZ RUSHING TO MY AID, JUDGED DISCRETION THE BETTER PART OF VALOR AND DASHED FOR HIS HORSE...

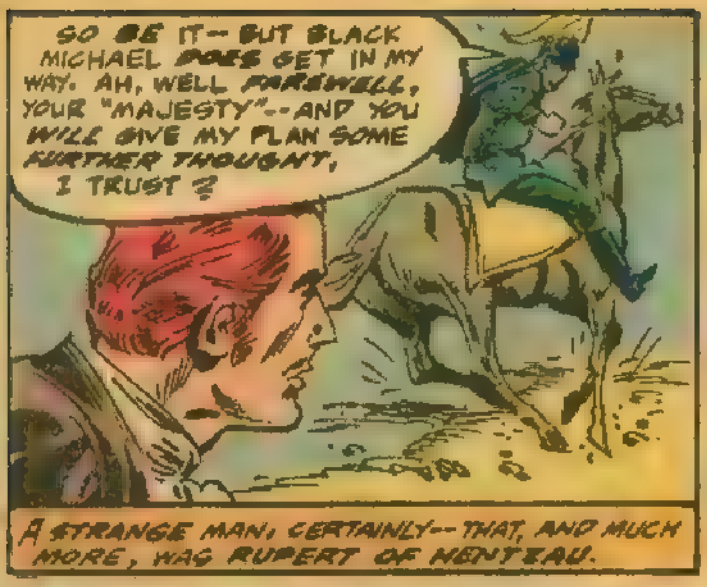
WITH BUT A SINGLE GLEAM OF MOONLIGHT, WE MIGHT HAVE RIDDLED HIM WITH BULLETS, BUT THE DARKNESS WAS TOO HEAVY...
THE DEUCE TAKE HIM! BUT AT LEAST WE GOT TWO OF THE DEVILS -- WHO ARE THEY?

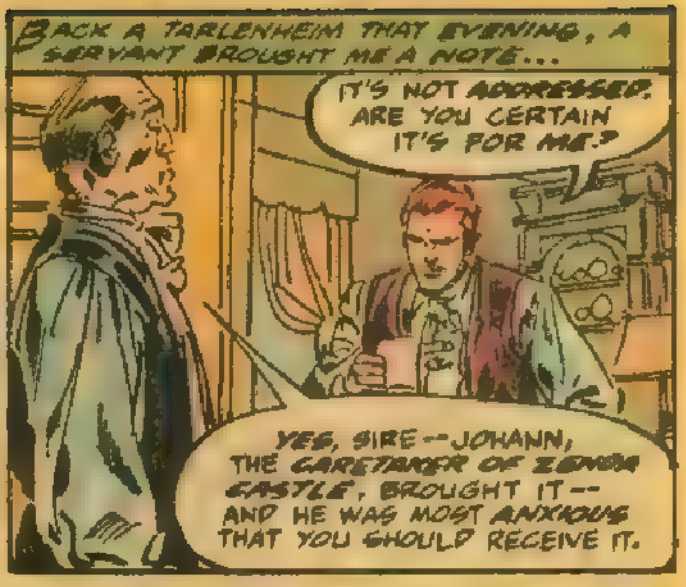
LAUENGRAM AND KRAFSTEIN -- THAT REDUCES "THE SIX" TO "THE FOUR."
WELL, AT LEAST THAT'S SOMETHING -- SINCE WE MUST NOW ABANDON OUR MISSION BEFORE HENTZAU RETURNS WITH MORE MEN.

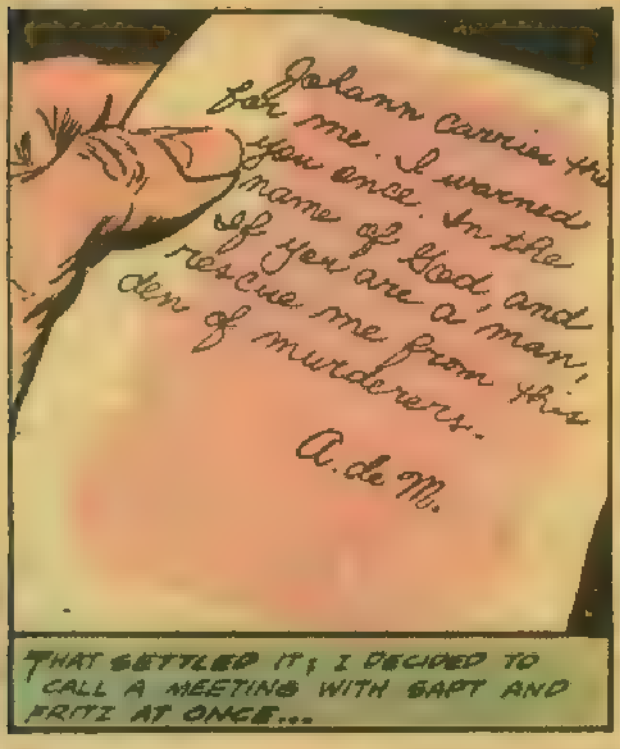

WE DISPOSED OF THE THREE BODIES BY THROWING THEM INTO THE MOAT...
IN THIS MANNER, THEY'LL EVENTUALLY BE FOUND AND GIVEN DECENT BURIAL -- BUT NOT UNTIL WE'VE MADE GOOD OUR ESCAPE.


THEN WE GALLOPED OFF DOWN THE HILL IN HASTE, RELIEVED THAT NONE IN OUR PARTY HAD BEEN INJURED, BUT EVEN MORE WORRIED OVER THE SAFETY OF THE KING.
OUR PLANS FOR THE NIGHT HAD BEEN FOILED.

THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO BUT BIDE OUR TIME FOR ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY. THE NEXT DAY I TOOK A RIDE WITH FLAVIA... AND MARSHAL STRAKENCZ, HER PERSONAL GUARD...
LOOK THERE -- A FUNERAL PROCESSION. I WONDER WHO COULD HAVE DIED...?
IT APPEARS THERE HAVE BEEN THREE DEATHS -- AND RUPERT OF HENTZAU RIDES IN THE LEAD...
HENTZAU! RUPERT OF HENTZAU!
HENTZAU RODE UP TO US AND I ASKED, IN ALL INNOCENCE, ABOUT THE PROCESSION...
YOUR "MAJESTY," THOSE ARE MY FRIENDS, LAUENGRAM, KRAFSTEIN, AND MAX HOLF. THEY LOST THEIR LIVES LAST NIGHT AS A RESULT OF A... QUARREL.
AN UNFORTUNATE AFFAIR, HENTZAU -- I MUST ISSUE A STERN LAW AGAINST DUELLING.
AND NOW, IF MARSHAL STRAKENCZ WILL RIDE AHEAD WITH THE PRINCESS, I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK WITH YOU ALONE.
AND WHEN FLAVIA AND STRAKENCZ HAD LEFT US...
YOU FOUGHT BRAVELY LAST NIGHT, HENTZAU, BUT YOU'RE MUCH TOO YOUNG TO DIE.
HAH! THAT, YOUR "MAJESTY," IS QUITE OUT OF THE QUESTION. HOWEVER, I DO HAVE A COUNTER-PROPOSAL... FOR YOU.
WHY NOT DELIVER YOUR PRISONER SAFELY TO ME, AND I PROMISE YOU WILL COME TO NO HARM. I MIGHT EVEN ARRANGE A REWARD...
ATTACK ZENDA CASTLE BOLDLY, PLACING SAPT AND FRITZ IN THE LEAD. I WILL ARRANGE FOR SAPT, FRITZ AND BLACK MICHAEL TO BE KILLED -- AND THE KING WILL DESCEND JACOB'S LADDER.
THEN ONLY TWO WILL REMAIN TO SHARE THE SPOILS -- I, RUPERT OF HENTZAU, AND YOU... THE KING OF RURITANIA.
IS THAT NOT A WORTHWHILE PROPOSITION? A THRONE AND THE PRINCESS FLAVIA? AS FOR ME, I'LL SETTLE FOR THE LADY WHO IS AT THE CASTLE NOW -- ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN.
SILLY CREATURE -- SHE PREFERS BLACK MICHAEL, BUT I'LL SOON CHANGE HER MIND.
SO YOU'D EVEN TURN AGAINST BLACK MICHAEL. WELL, MY ANSWER IS NO.


SO BE IT — BUT BLACK MICHAEL DOES GET IN MY WAY. AH, WELL FAREWELL, YOUR "MAJESTY" — AND YOU WILL GIVE MY PLAN SOME FURTHER THOUGHT, I TRUST?
A STRANGE MAN, CERTAINLY — THAT, AND MUCH MORE, WAS RUPERT OF HENTZAU.


BACK AT TARLENHEIM THAT EVENING, A SERVANT BROUGHT ME A NOTE...
IT'S NOT ADDRESSED. ARE YOU CERTAIN IT'S FOR ME?
YES, SIRE — JOHANN, THE CARETAKER OF ZENDA CASTLE, BROUGHT IT — AND HE WAS MOST ANXIOUS THAT YOU SHOULD RECEIVE IT.

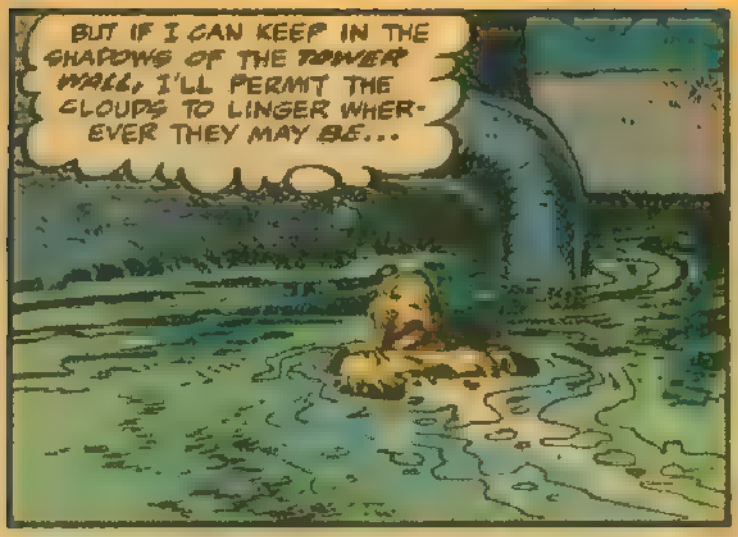

Johann carries this for me. I warned you once. In the name of God, and if you are a man, rescue me from this den of murderers.
A. de M.
THAT SETTLED IT; I DECIDED TO CALL A MEETING WITH SAPT AND FRITZ AT ONCE...

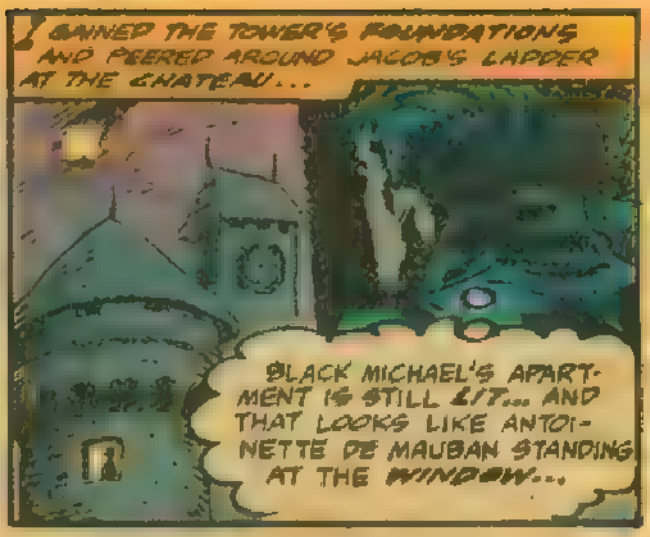
BUT AS WE SAT DOWN TO DISCUSS OUR NEXT STEPS...
WE'VE FAILED TO DO A SINGLE THING TO HELP THE KING — NOT TO MENTION ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN! I TELL YOU, WE MUST—
BAK BAK BAK
SEE WHO IT IS, FRITZ.

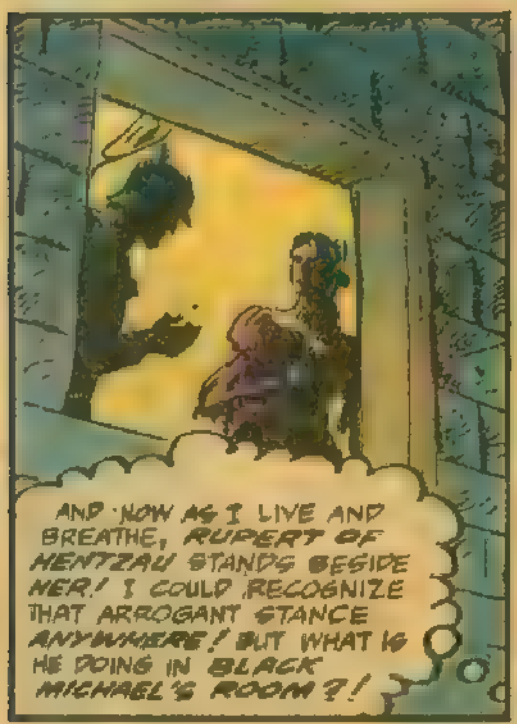
IT WAS MARSHAL STRAKENCZ, AND HE LOOKED GRAVELY TROUBLED...
THE PEOPLE ARE GROWING ANGRY, YOUR HIGHNESS, THEY ... THEY'RE DEMANDING THAT YOU SET A DATE FOR YOUR MARRIAGE TO THE PRINCESS FLAVIA.

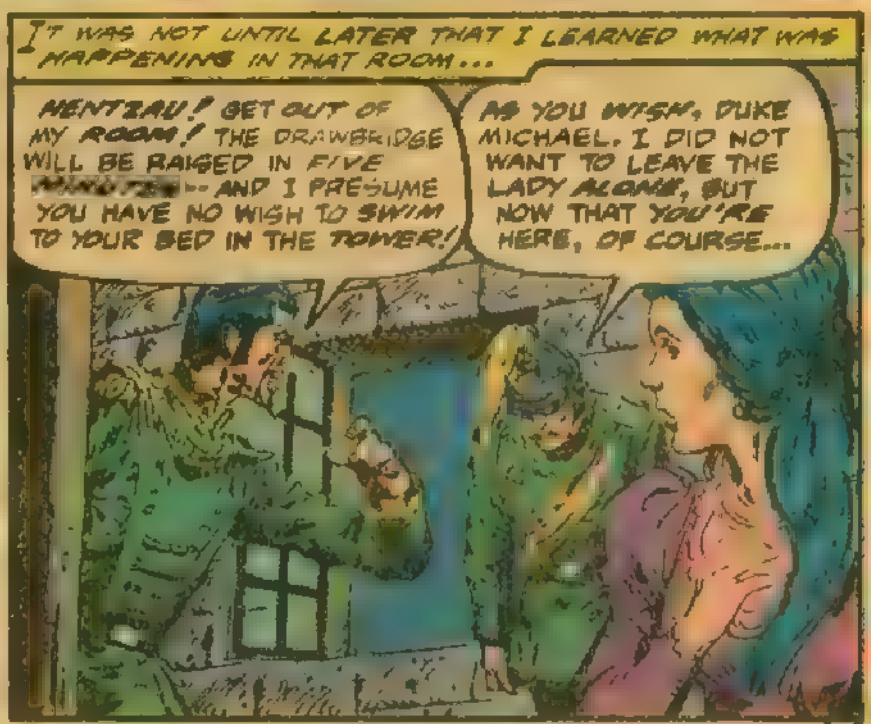
VERY WELL, STRAKENCZ, I HAVE DELAYED LONG ENOUGH. SET THE WEDDING FOR TWO WEEKS FROM TODAY — AT THE STRELSAU CATHEDRAL. WILL THAT PLEASE THEM?
IT WILL INDEED, YOUR MAJESTY! AND MAY I BE THE FIRST TO SAY — CONGRATULATIONS?
NOW I HAD TO MAKE GOOD IN MY RESCUE OF THE KING — OR GIVE UP COMPLETELY.

LATER, FEARFUL FOR HIS LIFE YET GREEDY FOR MORE MONEY, JOHANN FOUND ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO STEAL AWAY FROM ZENDA CASTLE...
THE KING IS VERY SICK NOW, SIR, AND MME. DE MAUBAN IS CARING FOR HIM -- BUT HE CAN'T LAST MUCH LONGER.
HERE'S TWENTY THOUSAND CROWNS, JOHANN, YOU'LL HAVE FIFTY THOUSAND MORE IF YOU DO AS I SAY.
I'LL TRY, SIR -- I REALLY WILL.
THEN DELIVER THIS SEALED NOTE TO MME. DE MAUBAN, AND AT TWO O'CLOCK TOMORROW MORNING, FLING OPEN THE CHATEAU DOOR -- BUT DON'T FAIL BY AN INSTANT. JUDGE THE TIME BY THE TOLLING OF THE CHATEAU'S OWN CLOCK.
HE AGREED READILY...
... AND I CALLED IN SAPT AND FRITZ FOR OUR FINAL PLANS...
THEN WE'RE AGREED! WHEN JOHANN OPENS THE CHATEAU DOOR AT TWO A.M., YOU AND YOUR MEN WILL RUSH INSIDE, SAPT.
VERY WELL, RASSENDYLL -- AND HEAVEN HELP US ALL.
AT THAT SAME MOMENT, ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN HAS ORDERS TO SHOUT, "HELP, MICHAEL! HENTZAU!" AND WHEN THEY RUSH TO HER AID YOU'LL STRIKE THEM DOWN.
AT MIDNIGHT, SAPT'S COMMAND LEFT TARLENHEIM BY A ROUNDABOUT ROUTE THAT WOULD DELIVER THEM TO THE CASTLE AT 1:45...
...GIVING ME A CHANCE TO SAY THE STAGE, SINCE I WOULD TAKE [illegible] ALIVE.
THE NIGHT WAS FINE AND CLEAR -- ALMOST TOO CLEAR -- AND I REACHED THE CASTLE WITHOUT DIFFICULTY...
I HAD CARRIED AROUND MY WAIST AND ANCHORED AT AROUND THE SAME TREE. THE CHATEAU CLOCK TOLLED EERILY...
TWELVE-FORTY-FIVE -- SO FAR, SO GOOD. A CLOUDY NIGHT WOULD'VE HELPED, BUT WE CAN'T CONTROL THE WEATHER...
I HAD ASSIGNED THE ACTUAL RESCUE AT THE TOWER TO MYSELF, SO I SUPPOSE I CAN BE FORGIVEN THE LEVITY OF NERVOUSNESS...


BUT IF I CAN KEEP IN THE SHADOWS OF THE TOWER WALL, I'LL PERMIT THE CLOUDS TO LINGER WHEREVER THEY MAY BE...


I GAINED THE TOWER'S FOUNDATIONS AND PEERED AROUND JACOB'S LADDER AT THE CHATEAU...
BLACK MICHAEL'S APARTMENT IS STILL LIT... AND THAT LOOKS LIKE ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN STANDING AT THE WINDOW...


AND NOW AS I LIVE AND BREATHE, RUPERT OF HENTZAU STANDS BESIDE HER! I COULD RECOGNIZE THAT ARROGANT STANCE ANYWHERE! BUT WHAT IS HE DOING IN BLACK MICHAEL'S ROOM?!


IT WAS NOT UNTIL LATER THAT I LEARNED WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THAT ROOM...
HENTZAU! GET OUT OF MY ROOM! THE DRAWBRIDGE WILL BE RAISED IN FIVE [illegible] -- AND I PRESUME YOU HAVE NO WISH TO SWIM TO YOUR BED IN THE TOWER!
AS YOU WISH, DUKE MICHAEL. I DID NOT WANT TO LEAVE THE LADY ALONE, BUT NOW THAT YOU'RE HERE, OF COURSE...

A FEW MINUTES LATER, HENTZAU EMERGED FROM THE CHATEAU ONTO THE DRAWBRIDGE, CALLING BACK OVER HIS SHOULDER...
DE GAUTET! HURRY UP, YOU FOOL -- UNLESS YOU WANT A BATH BEFORE YOUR BED!

BEWARE THE BRIDGE! BEWARE THE RAISING OF THE BRIDGE!
ALL RIGHT, HENTZAU, LET'S GO -- BEFORE THE BRIDGE SLIDES US BACK INTO THE CHATEAU.

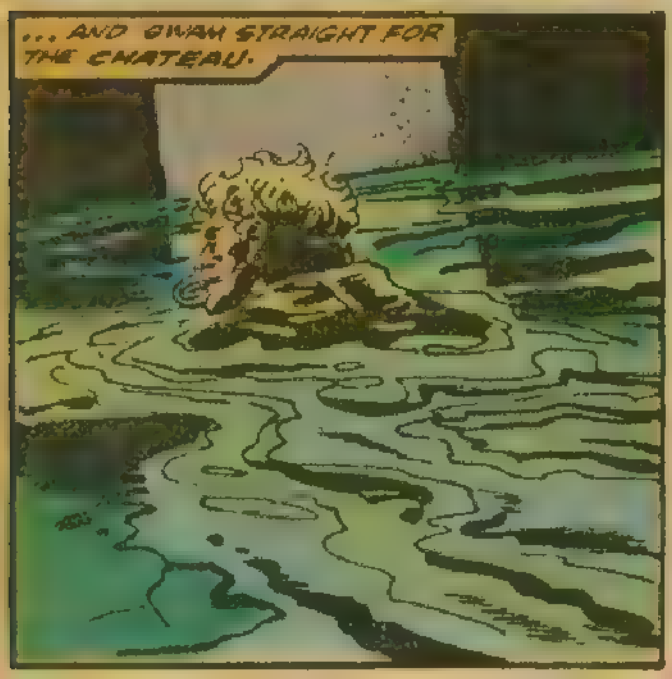
HENTZAU AND DE GAUTET RAN FOR THE TOWER ON WHOSE FOUNDATIONS I CROUCHED, AND THE TWO GAINED THE ENTRANCE ONLY AFTER THE DRAWBRIDGE HAD BEGUN TO RISE...

... AND BY THE TIME THE DRAWBRIDGE COMPLETED ITS RISE, HENTZAU AND DE GAUTET HAD VANISHED INSIDE THE TOWER, AND THE CHATEAU CLOCK TOLLED 1:15.

ALL WAS QUIET FOR A FEW MINUTES... AND THEN, SUDDENLY, A MAN EMERGED FROM THE TOWER DOORWAY...

PAUSING FOR A LONG LOOK AT THE WINDOW OF QUEEN ANNE'S ROOM, HENTZAU THEN DIVED INTO THE MURKY WATERS OF THE MOAT...

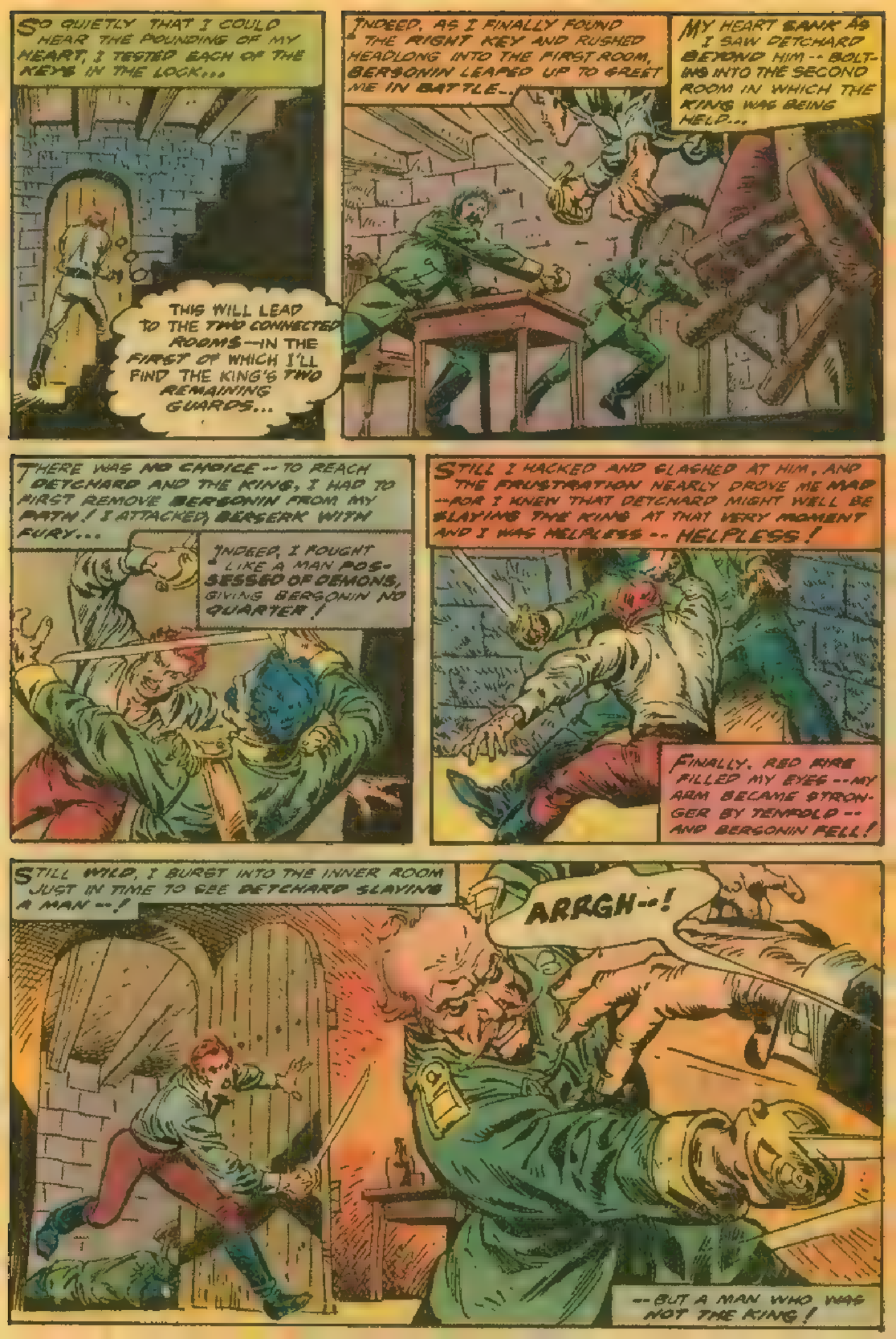
... AND SWAM STRAIGHT FOR THE CHATEAU.



REACHING THE CHATEAU SIDE OF THE MOAT, HE CLIMBED A FLIGHT OF STONE STEPS LEADING TO THE RAISED PORTCULLIS. I KNEW THAT, SOMEHOW, HE WOULD ENTER THE CHATEAU...

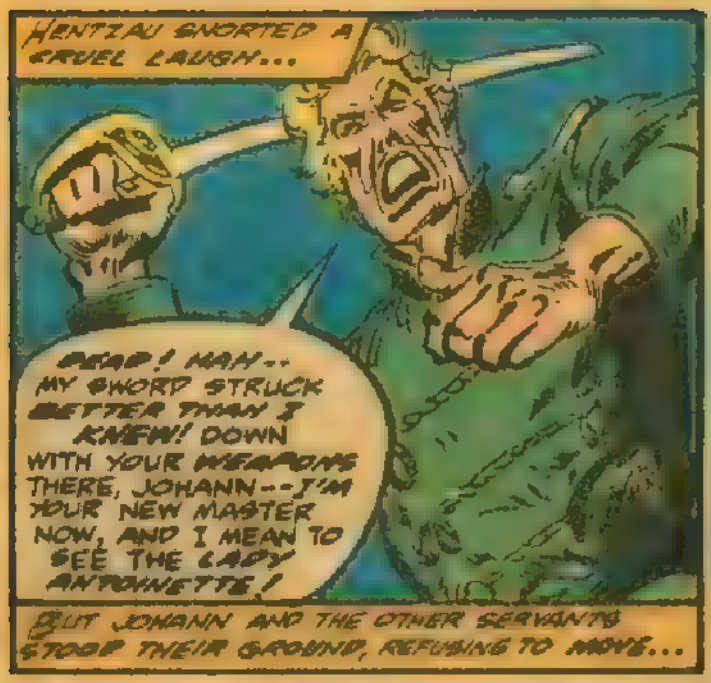
I CLIMBED THE TOWER STEPS FOR A BETTER VANTAGE POINT, BUT HENTZAU HAD ALREADY DISAPPEARED INTO THE CHATEAU...
SUDDENLY, I SAW A LIGHT BURNING IN THE WINDOW OF ANTOINETTE'S ROOM -- ADJOINING BLACK MICHAEL'S APARTMENT -- AND HEARD A TERRIBLE SCREAM...
HELP! MICHAEL! HENTZAU!!
ANTOINETTE'S VOICE -- AND THE SIGNAL CRY I HAD GIVEN HER IN MY NOTE -- BUT THE CHATEAU CLOCK HAD JUST STRUCK 1:30! IT WAS A HALF-HOUR TOO EARLY...
I COULD ONLY CURSE THE WORDING OF MY SIGNAL -- IT WAS THE SAME CRY SHE WOULD NATURALLY UTTER IF HENTZAU ATTACKED HER! IF RAPT'S MEN CHANCED TO ARRIVE EARLY, ALL WOULD BE THROWN INTO CONFUSION...
WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THERE?! OPEN THE DOOR OR I'LL BREAK IT DOWN!!
THAT'S BLACK MICHAEL'S VOICE -- HE'S COMING TO ANTOINETTE'S AID!
AGAIN, I COULD ONLY IMAGINE WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THAT ROOM -- BUT I HEARD THE CRASH OF WOOD, THE CLANGING OF STEEL ANGRY VOICES, ANTOINETTE'S SCREAMS...
HENTZAU! SO YOU WOULD DARE STEAL HER FROM HER VERY ROOM!
JOHANN -- HELP! SOMEONE HELP!!
BUT ABOVE IT ALL, THERE WAS THE FIENDISH LAUGHTER OF RUPERT OF HENTZAU -- WHOSE LOVE OF BATTLE WAS EXCEEDED, APPARENTLY, ONLY BY HIS LOVE OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN...
HA-HA-HAH! WELCOME, JOHANN -- HERE'S SOMETHING FOR YOU!
COME ON, MICHAEL -- YOU CAN FIGHT FOR THE LADY HARDER THAN THIS! OR CAN YOU -- ?! HA-HA-HAH!

FOR LONG MOMENTS, THE WILD SOUNDS CONTINUED -- INDICATING THAT HENTZAU FOUGHT WITH AMAZING SKILL AGAINST BLACK MICHAEL AND HIS PURSUERS...
HA-HA-HA-HA-HAH!!
BUT FINALLY, EVEN RUPERT HENTZAU WAS FORCED TO ADMIT THE SUPERIORITY OF NUMBERS...
KREEESH
HA-HA-HA-HAH!!
...ALTHOUGH NEVER FOR AN INSTANT DID HE LOSE HIS MARSHAL POISE.
THEN, EVEN AS HENTZAU SPLASHED INTO THE MOAT, THE TOWER DOOR FLEW OPEN...
HENTZAU -- WHERE ARE YOU?! WHAT WAS THAT SOUND -- LIKE GLASS BREAKING?!
IT'S DE GAUTET! HERE'S MY CHANCE...!
I LUNGED FORWARD AND STRUCK HIM WITH ALL MY STRENGTH. THE MAN FELL DEAD WITHOUT A WORD...
THIS LEAVES ONLY TWO MORE OF "THE SIX" ON GUARD WITHIN!
THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF OUR SCHEME WAS COMPLETELY DESTROYED, BUT MY FIRST CONSIDERATION WAS STILL THE KING'S RESCUE. I HAD A CHANCE NOW AND, WITHOUT THOUGHT, I TOOK IT...
I ALSO TOOK DE GAUTET'S RING OF KEYS.

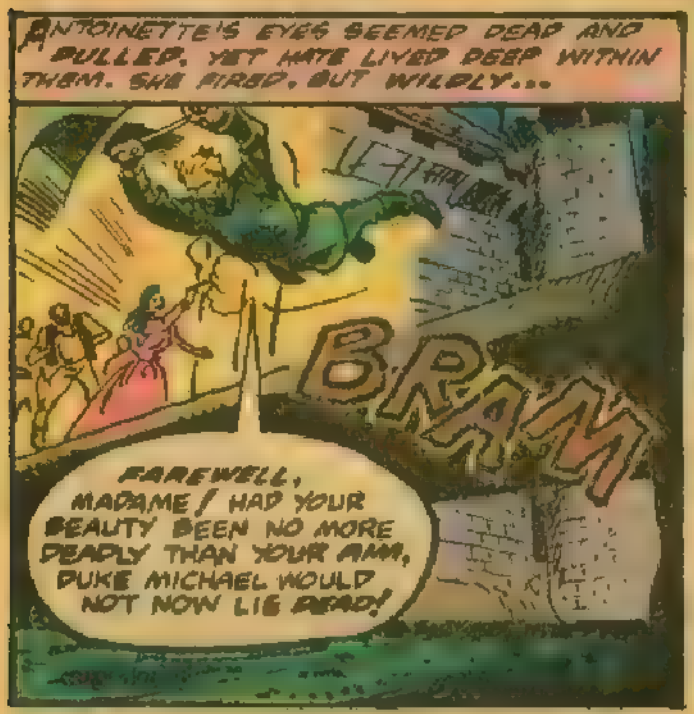

SO QUIETLY THAT I COULD HEAR THE POUNDING OF MY HEART, I TESTED EACH OF THE KEYS IN THE LOCK...
THIS WILL LEAD TO THE TWO CONNECTED ROOMS—IN THE FIRST OF WHICH I'LL FIND THE KING'S TWO REMAINING GUARDS...
INDEED, AS I FINALLY FOUND THE RIGHT KEY AND RUSHED HEADLONG INTO THE FIRST ROOM, BERSONIN LEAPED UP TO GREET ME IN BATTLE...
MY HEART SANK AS I SAW DETCHARD BEYOND HIM -- BOLTING INTO THE SECOND ROOM IN WHICH THE KING WAS BEING HELD...
THERE WAS NO CHOICE -- TO REACH DETCHARD AND THE KING, I HAD TO FIRST REMOVE BERSONIN FROM MY PATH! I ATTACKED BERSERK WITH FURY...
INDEED, I FOUGHT LIKE A MAN POSSESSED OF DEMONS, GIVING BERSONIN NO QUARTER!
STILL I HACKED AND SLASHED AT HIM, AND THE FRUSTRATION NEARLY DROVE ME MAD -- FOR I KNEW THAT DETCHARD MIGHT WELL BE SLAYING THE KING AT THAT VERY MOMENT AND I WAS HELPLESS -- HELPLESS!
FINALLY, RED RAGE FILLED MY EYES -- MY ARM BECAME STRONGER BY TENFOLD -- AND BERSONIN FELL!
STILL WILD, I BURST INTO THE INNER ROOM JUST IN TIME TO SEE DETCHARD SLAYING A MAN --!
ARRGH--!
-- BUT A MAN WHO WAS NOT THE KING!

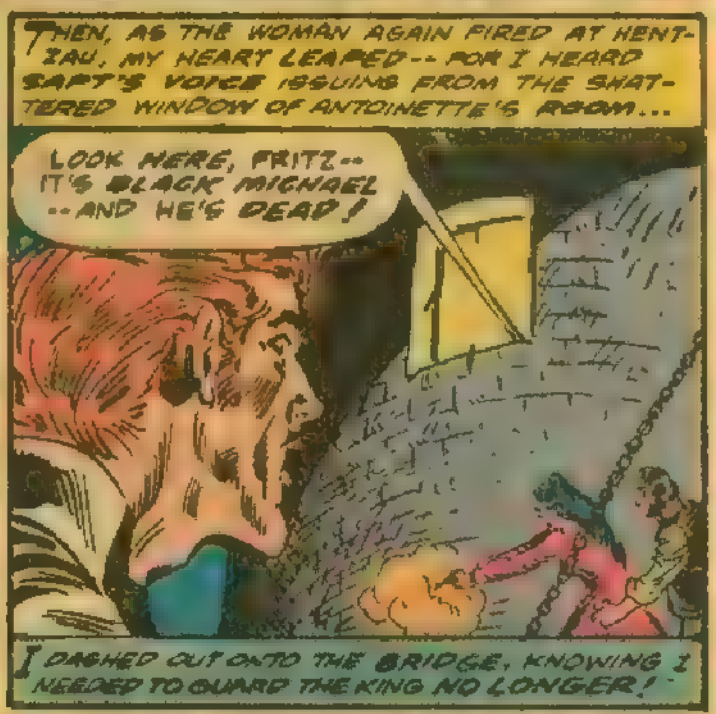
IT WAS A DOCTOR, APPARENTLY SUMMONED TO TREAT THE KING AND PREVENT HIM FROM DYING, AND THROUGH HIS DEVOTION, HE HAD SAVED THE LIFE OF HIS SOVEREIGN -- BUT AT THE COST OF HIS OWN LIFE...
YOU !!
YES, DETCHARD, AND YOU'LL HAVE TO KILL ME BEFORE I'LL LET YOU KILL THE KING.
HE WAS READILY WILLING TO TRY, LUNGING FORWARD WITHOUT WARNING TO PIERCE MY ARM WITH THE POINT OF HIS SWORD...
AHN--!
COUSIN RUDOLF..? IS THAT YOU ...REALLY YOU, COUSIN...?
I WAS FORCED TO TRANSFER MY SWORD TO MY LEFT HAND AND FEND OFF DETCHARD'S DAZZLING ATTACK AS BEST I COULD...
THE CHAIR, SIRE-- DRIVE THE CHAIR AGAINST HIS LEGS-- TRY TO GET HIM OFF BALANCE!
Y-YES, COUSIN RUDOLF... I... I'LL TRY TO... H-HELP YOU ..
THOUGH WEAK AND EXTREMELY FEEBLE, THE KING APPROACHED WITH HIS CHAIR .. AND DETCHARD SPUN ABRUPTLY, DEALING HIM A MURDEROUS BLOW...
NOOO!!
EVEN AS THE KING FELL, I LUNGED FORWARD SCREAMING BEYOND CONTROL AND RAN DETCHARD THROUGH!
BUT WAS IT TOO LATE..? WERE BOTH DETCHARD AND THE KING NOW DEAD--?
NO... YOUR HEART STILL BEATS, SIRE, ALTHOUGH THE WOUND IS SEVERE...

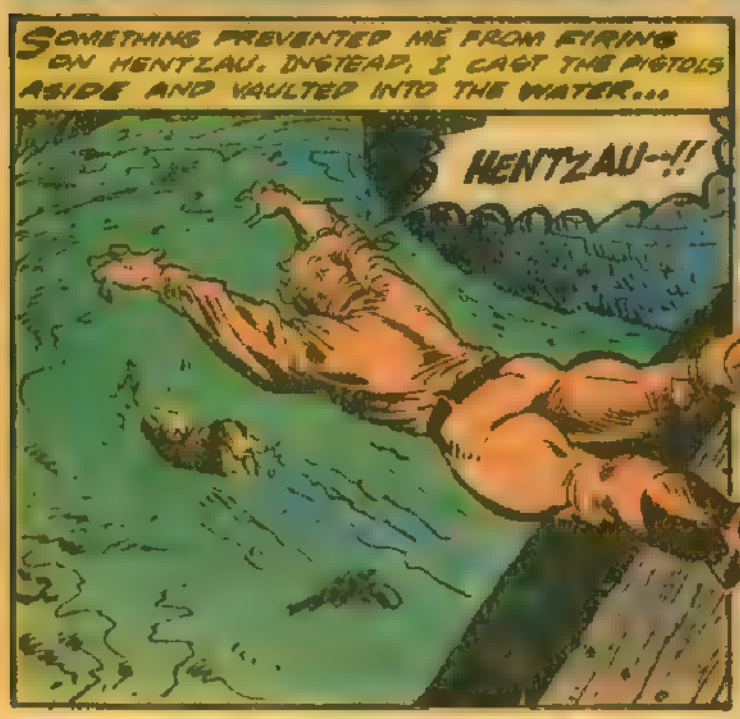
THEN, HEARING THE SOUND OF THE DRAWBRIDGE COMING DOWN, I REALIZED THERE WERE STILL MORE ENEMIES TO CONQUER, AND I DARED NOT LINGER TO TEND THE KING...
IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, YOUR MAJESTY, I MUST LEAVE YOU NOW--BUT, GOD WILLING, I SHALL RETURN SOON.
PAUSING ONLY TO BIND MY WOUND, I RUSHED BACK TO THE OUTER ROOM AND THERE SAW TWO PISTOLS ON A TABLE...
BERSONIN AND DETCHARD HAD BEEN UNABLE TO REACH THEM WHEN MY ENTRY TOOK THEM BY SURPRISE. I REACHED FOR THEM NOW...
RUSHING UP THE STAIRS, I HEARD THE CLOCK STRIKE 2:30. WHY HAD NO ONE CROSSED THE DRAWBRIDGE YET? AND WHERE WERE SAPT AND HIS MEN? HAD JOHANN OPENED THE MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE CHATEAU FOR THEM?
HAD THEY SEARCHED AND NOT FOUND ME? OR HAD THEY BEEN DEFEATED BY BLACK MICHAEL'S FORCES?
THESE AND MANY OTHER DOUBTS AND FEARS FILLED MY MIND UNTIL I HEARD A LAUGH--AN EASY, SCORNFUL, DEFIANT LAUGH--AND SAW RUPERT NENTEAU STANDING ON THE DRAWBRIDGE...
WELL, JOHANN, YOU'VE LET THE BRIDGE DOWN--BUT LET'S SEE BLACK MICHAEL!
COME DOWN AND FIGHT FOR HER, MICHAEL--COME AND FIGHT FOR THE LADY ANTOINETTE!
THEN THERE WAS A LOUD SHRIEK, AND ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN APPEARED IN THE SHATTERED WINDOW...
HE'S DEAD! OH MY GOD--BLACK MICHAEL'S DEAD!!


HENTZAU SNORTED A CRUEL LAUGH...
DEAD! MAH.. MY SWORD STRUCK BETTER THAN I KNEW! DOWN WITH YOUR WEAPONS THERE, JOHANN--I'M YOUR NEW MASTER NOW, AND I MEAN TO SEE THE LADY ANTOINETTE!
BUT JOHANN AND THE OTHER SERVANTS STOOP THEIR GROUND, REFUSING TO MOVE...

...UNTIL ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN PUSHED HER WAY THROUGH THEM AND STOOD FACING HENTZAU WITH A REVOLVER IN HER HAND...
SEE ME YOU SMALL RUPERT OF HENTZAU -- BUT IT WILL BE THE LAST SIGHT YOUR EYES EVER TAKE!


ANTOINETTE'S EYES SEEMED DEAD AND DULLED. YET HATE LIVED DEEP WITHIN THEM. SHE FIRED, BUT WILDLY...
BRAM
FAREWELL, MADAME! HAD YOUR BEAUTY BEEN NO MORE DEADLY THAN YOUR AIM, DUKE MICHAEL WOULD NOT NOW LIE DEAD!


THEN, AS THE WOMAN AGAIN FIRED AT HENTZAU, MY HEART LEAPED -- FOR I HEARD SAPT'S VOICE ISSUING FROM THE SHATTERED WINDOW OF ANTOINETTE'S ROOM...
LOOK HERE, FRITZ-- IT'S BLACK MICHAEL --AND HE'S DEAD!
I DASHED OUT ONTO THE BRIDGE, KNOWING I NEEDED TO GUARD THE KING NO LONGER!


SOMETHING PREVENTED ME FROM FIRING ON HENTZAU. INSTEAD, I CAST THE PISTOLS ASIDE AND VAULTED INTO THE WATER...
HENTZAU--!!

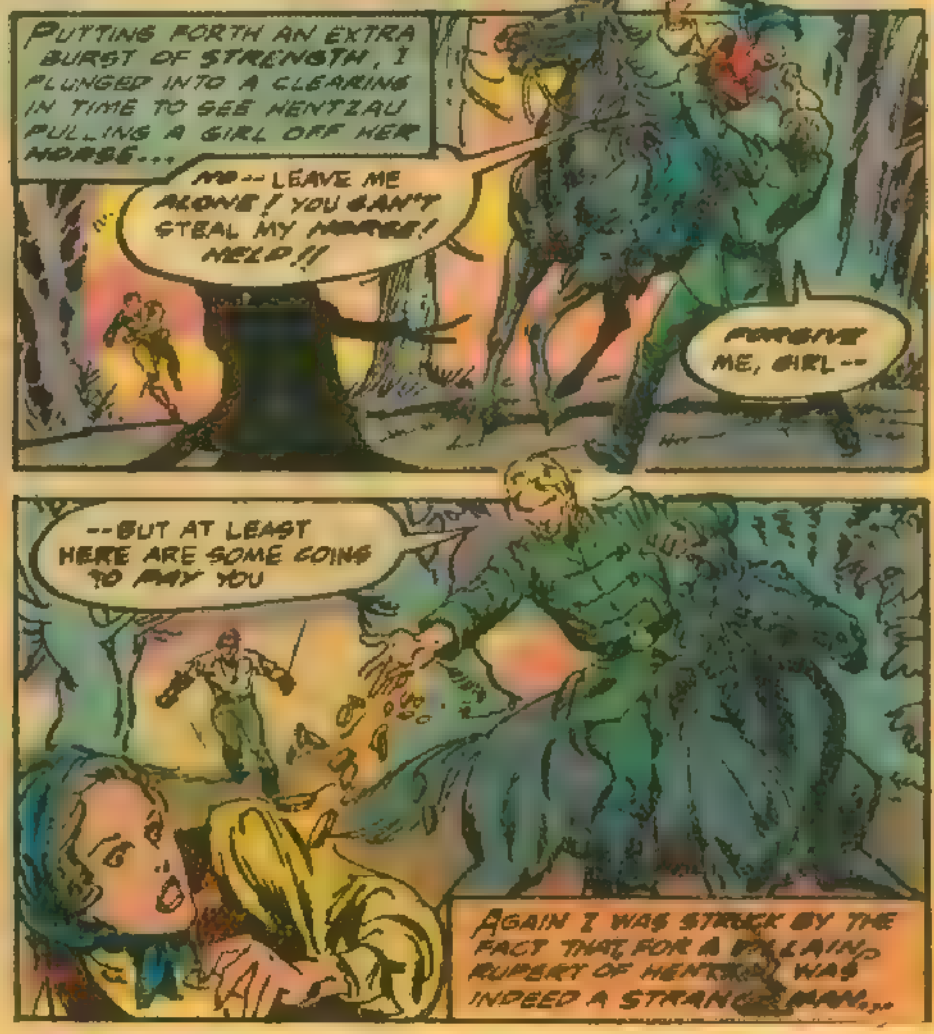
HENTZAU LOOKED OVER HIS SHOULDER, BUT KEPT SWIMMING --AND I, AFTER HIM...
LOOK! IT'S THE KING-- THE KING! HOLD YOUR FIRE!

SEEKING SOME ESCAPE FROM THE MOAT, HENTZAU EVENTUALLY FOUND--
HAH--A ROPE! HOW THE DEVIL IT CAME TO BE HERE, I DON'T KNOW--BUT I WON'T ARGUE WITH ITS PRESENCE!
STOP, HENTZAU--STOP!!

NOT UNTIL HE HAD REACHED THE TOP OF THE MOAT WALL DID HE TURN TO LOOK DOWN ON ME...
WHY, IT'S MY FRIEND THE PLAY-ACTOR! HOW DID YOU GET HERE?
LISTEN TO ME HENTZAU! NOW THAT BLACK MICHAEL'S DEAD, I'M READY TO DISCUSS YOUR PROPOSAL FOR DIVIDING THE KINGDOM!
HE HESITATED, APPARENTLY QUITE WILLING TO CONSIDER ANYTHING THAT MIGHT GAIN HIM THE LADY ANTOINETTE...

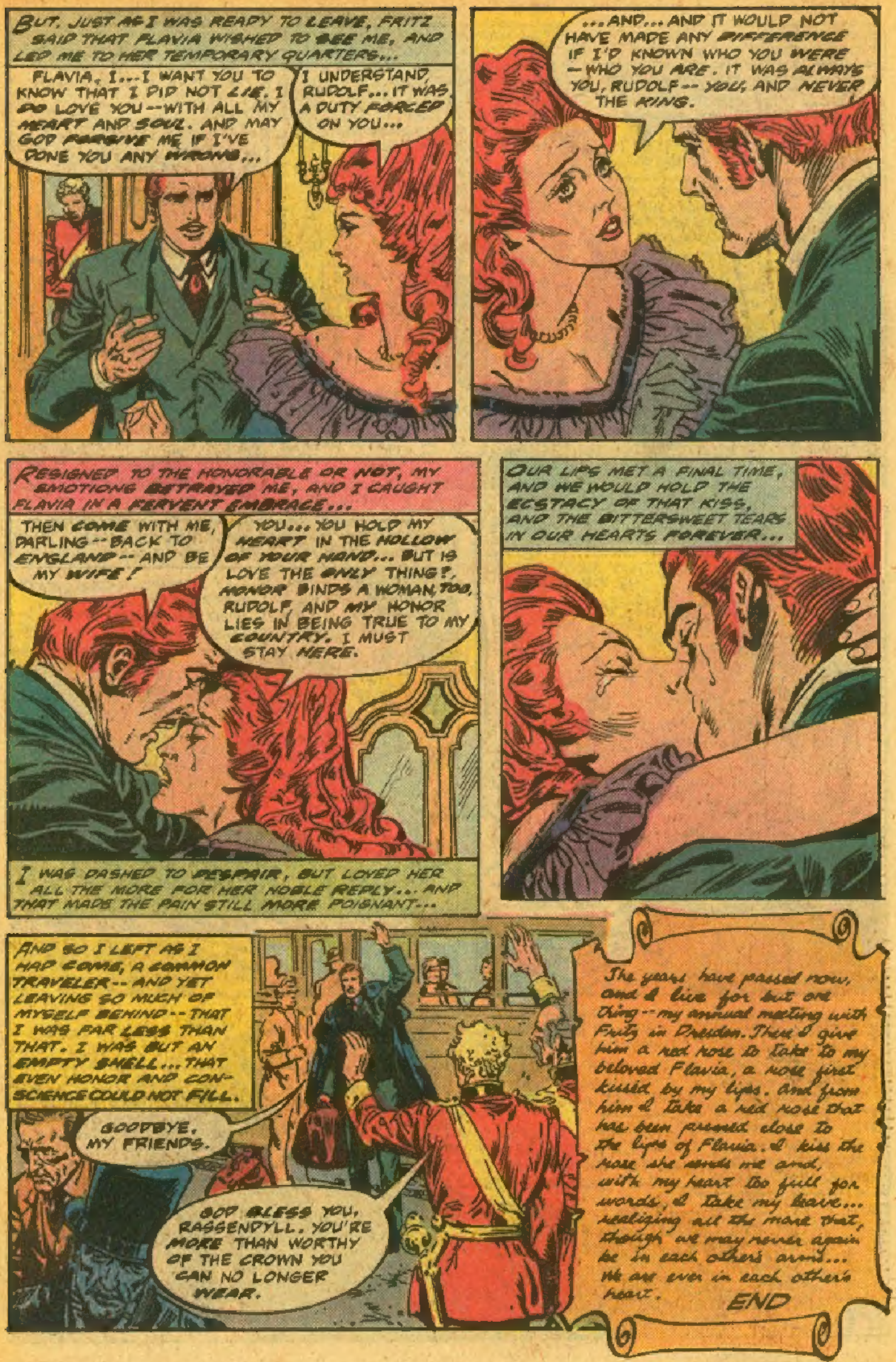
... BUT WHEN THE GREAT ALARM BELL OF THE CHATEAU BEGAN TO RING FURIOUSLY, AND LOUD SHOUTS REACHED ACROSS THE DISTANCE...
WAIT, HENTZAU! I WANT TO ACCEPT YOUR PROPOSAL! WAIT!
I'D LIKE TO, MY FRIEND--BUT THOSE BELLS MEAN I MUST RUN!

MY PLOY HAD FAILED, AND I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO PURSUE HIM, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD ALREADY VANISHED INTO THE FOREST. THEN--
EEEEEEEEEE!
--A WOMAN'S SHRILL SCREAM RIPPED THROUGH THE DENSE GLOOM.


PUTTING FORTH AN EXTRA BURST OF STRENGTH, I PLUNGED INTO A CLEARING IN TIME TO SEE HENTZAU PULLING A GIRL OFF HER HORSE...
NO--LEAVE ME ALONE! YOU CAN'T STEAL MY HORSE! HELP!!
FORGIVE ME, GIRL--
--BUT AT LEAST HERE ARE SOME GOING TO PAY YOU
AGAIN I WAS STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT, FOR A VILLAIN, RUPERT OF HENTZAU WAS INDEED A STRANGE MAN...

HE THEN RODE SLOWLY TOWARD ME...
NOW THAT I'VE GOT THE LUXURY OF A GETAWAY HORSE, YOUR "MAJESTY", I CAN AFFORD TO LISTEN TO YOU. WHAT DID YOU DO AT ZENDA CASTLE
I FOUND THE KING AND PRAY THAT HE STILL LIVES — KILLED THREE OF YOUR FRIENDS — AND SPARED YOUR LIFE, FOR A REASON I'LL NEVER KNOW. I WAS BEHIND YOU ON THAT BRIDGE, HENTZAU, WITH TWO PISTOLS IN MY HANDS.
SO I WAS BETWEEN TWO FIRES, WAS I? GOOD ENOUGH! BUT TELL ME — ARE YOU READY TO TAKE UP PARTNERSHIP IN THE KINGDOM?
I MANAGED TO LAY MY CHEEK OPEN, BUT ONLY AS I WAS DRIVEN TO THE GROUND BY THE LASHING HOOVES OF HIS HORSE. AND THEN—
BRAM
NO, CONFOUND YOU! I'LL HAVE NO PART OF YOUR VILE SCHEME! NOW GET OFF THAT HORSE AND FIGHT LIKE A MAN!!
IN FRONT OF A LADY'S PIE, YOUR "MAJESTY"!
AU REVOIR, RUDOLF RASSENDYLL — THAT SHOT WAS A LITTLE TOO CLOSE!
I SPRANG AT HIM, SLASHING IN RAGE — BUT HE PARRIED THE BLOW...
EVEN AS FRITZ REACHED ME, RUPERT OF HENTZAU WAS GONE. BASE AND DECEITFUL AS HE WAS, THERE WAS YET A CERTAIN DASHING GALLANTRY TO THE MAN — AND PERHAPS IT WAS THAT WHICH HAD STAYED MY HAND FROM KILLING HIM.
FRITZ, YOU'VE COME JUST IN TIME, IT SEEMS. TELL ME — DOES THE KING LIVE?
YES, THANKS TO YOU — THE BRAVEST MAN WHO EVER LIVED. NOW REST, RASSENDYLL, AND I'LL TELL YOU WHAT'S HAPPENED...
FRITZ TOLD ME THAT JOHANN HAD BEEN UNABLE TO OPEN THE CHATEAU DOOR AT THE AGREED TIME, BEING OCCUPIED WITH THE DEFENSE OF BLACK MICHAEL. IT WAS NOT UNTIL 8:20 THAT CAPT. FRITZ, AND THE OTHERS WERE ABLE TO GAIN ENTRY. MEANWHILE THE PRINCESS FLAVIA HAD LEARNED THAT THE KING LAY WOUNDED IN ZENDA CASTLE AND, THINKING IT WAS ME, INSISTED THAT MARSHAL STRAKENCZ ESCORT HER TO THE CASTLE AT ONCE...

INDEED, EVEN AS FRITZ WAS COMPLETING HIS STORY, FLAVIA AND STRAKENCZ WERE ACCOSTED BY THE PEASANT GIRL...
YOU MUST HELP ME! A MAN STOLE MY HORSE -- AND THE KING -- HE TRIED TO HELP -- BUT HE NOW LIES WOUNDED BACK IN THE GLADE!
NONSENSE, GIRL -- THE KING LIES WOUNDED IN ZENDA CASTLE.
COME, MARSHAL STRAKENCZ -- LET US SEE ABOUT THIS. THE KING CANNOT BE IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE.
I HEARD FLAVIA'S VOICE, AND THEN FRITZ WAS RUSHING AWAY FROM ME, AS IF TO CUT HER OFF...
FRITZ, THIS GIRL SAYS THE KING IS NOT IN THE CASTLE -- BUT SOMEWHERE IN THIS CLEARING...
NO, PRINCESS FLAVIA, THE GIRL IS WRONG! THE KING IS AT ZENDA CASTLE AND --
WAIT! WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, FRITZ?! I SEE THE KING RIGHT THERE -- WITH MY OWN EYES!
NO, PRINCESS FLAVIA -- WAIT! THAT IS NOT THE KING...!
NOT THE KING --?! RUDOLF, LOOK AT ME! LOOK AT ME, MY DARLING -- TELL ME WHAT THIS MEANS...!
IT...IT MEANS.. DEAR GOD FORGIVE ME, FLAVIA... IT MEANS THAT FRITZ SPEAKS THE TRUTH...
I...I AM NOT THE KING.
I HEARD HER GASP CLOSE TO MY EAR, FELT HER BODY TREMBLING AGAINST MINE... AND THEN, AS SHE FAINTED IN MY ARMS...
...I WEPT... LONG, AND BITTERLY. DEAR GOD, WAS THIS HOW IT ALL MUST END?
SEVERAL DAYS LATER, HAVING RECOVERED FROM MY SLIGHT INJURIES AND RESIGNED THAT IT MUST END WITH MY BANISHED, I WENT TO SAY FAREWELL TO THE KING.
COUSIN RUDOLF, SAPT AND FRITZ TELL ME THAT I CAN'T TAKE YOU BACK TO STRELSAU -- THAT THE SECRET MUST BE KEPT.
EVEN SO, I HOPE THE PEOPLE THERE WILL FIND ME THE SAME KIND OF RULER YOU HAVE BEEN.
IF I HAVE SERVED YOU, SIRE, THEN THAT IS REWARD ENOUGH. FAREWELL.


BUT, JUST AS I WAS READY TO LEAVE, FRITZ SAID THAT FLAVIA WISHED TO SEE ME, AND LED ME TO HER TEMPORARY QUARTERS...
FLAVIA, I...I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I DID NOT LIE. I DO LOVE YOU--WITH ALL MY HEART AND SOUL. AND MAY GOD FORGIVE ME IF I'VE DONE YOU ANY WRONG...
I UNDERSTAND, RUDOLF... IT WAS A DUTY FORCED ON YOU...
...AND... AND IT WOULD NOT HAVE MADE ANY DIFFERENCE IF I'D KNOWN WHO YOU WERE --WHO YOU ARE. IT WAS ALWAYS YOU, RUDOLF -- YOU, AND NEVER THE KING.
RESIGNED TO THE HONORABLE OR NOT, MY EMOTIONS BETRAYED ME, AND I CAUGHT FLAVIA IN A FERVENT EMBRACE...
THEN COME WITH ME, DARLING -- BACK TO ENGLAND -- AND BE MY WIFE!
YOU... YOU HOLD MY HEART IN THE HOLLOW OF YOUR HAND... BUT IS LOVE THE ONLY THING?, HONOR BINDS A WOMAN, TOO, RUDOLF, AND MY HONOR LIES IN BEING TRUE TO MY COUNTRY. I MUST STAY HERE.
I WAS DASHED TO DESPAIR, BUT LOVED HER ALL THE MORE FOR HER NOBLE REPLY... AND THAT MADE THE PAIN STILL MORE POIGNANT...
OUR LIPS MET A FINAL TIME, AND WE WOULD HOLD THE ECSTACY OF THAT KISS, AND THE BITTERSWEET TEARS IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER...
AND SO I LEFT AS I HAD COME, A COMMON TRAVELER -- AND YET LEAVING SO MUCH OF MYSELF BEHIND -- THAT I WAS FAR LESS THAN THAT. I WAS BUT AN EMPTY SHELL... THAT EVEN HONOR AND CONSCIENCE COULD NOT FILL.
GOODBYE, MY FRIENDS.
GOD BLESS YOU, RASSENDYLL. YOU'RE MORE THAN WORTHY OF THE CROWN YOU CAN NO LONGER WEAR.
The years have passed now, and I live for but one thing -- my annual meeting with Fritz in Dresden. There I give him a red rose to take to my beloved Flavia, a rose first kissed by my lips. And from him I take a red rose that has been pressed close to the lips of Flavia. I kiss the rose she sends me and, with my heart too full for words, I take my leave... realizing all the more that, though we may never again be in each other's arms... We are ever in each other's heart.
END

ON SALE NOW!

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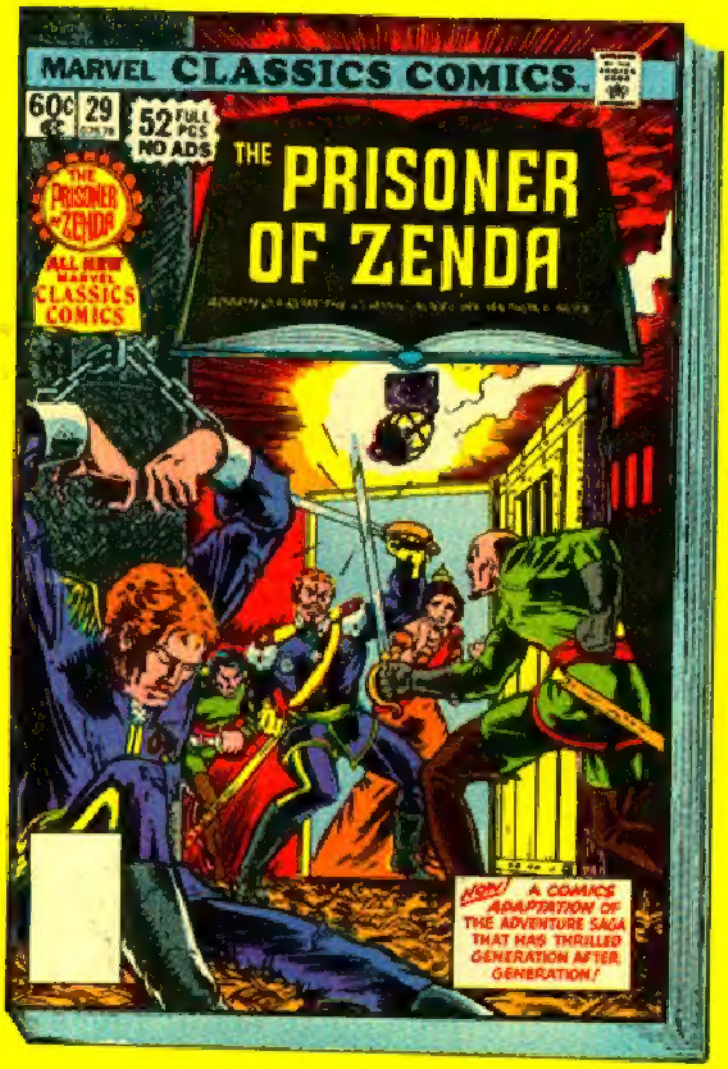
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